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Studies of the Parables of Our Lord

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By
HENRY T. SELL, D.D.
Author of The "Bible Study Text Books," "Sermons in Stories," etc.

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A WORD FROM THE PUBLISHERS

WHILE the material forming the content of this volume was in process of preparation, its Author was called to higher service. Prior to his translation, Dr. Sell was enabled to write a number of the Studies in their entirety; others he left only in outline. These latter were worked over and filled in by those who, for years, had been associated with Dr. Sell. In all instances, his outlines have been faithfully followed, and strict adherence given to his modes of thought and expression. It is sincerely hoped, moreover, that the spirit of his message has been caught and perpetuated in these pages.

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FOREWORD

THE parables of Jesus always repay the most careful study. They hold a mirror up to nature and furnish an insight into the workings of the human mind, such as no other literature in our language furnishes. They are as true to life in this hustling machine-marked age as in the Oriental atmosphere and pastoral setting in which they were uttered. The men and the issues of which the Master spoke are still with us. Tragedies of material success, such as Jesus instanced in "The Rich Fool," are still being enacted. Spurious goodness, set alongside sterling worth, as they are in "The Wheat and the Tares" are easily discoverable. The question of "Who is my neighbour?" raised and answered in "The Good Samaritan" is an issue at this very hour. The Prodigal Son is the prototype of flaming youth in all ages.

The underlying idea, in the present volume, is an endeavour to get at the spiritual and material values of the parables, without any undue beating about the bush. No attempt is made to cover every point in them with a careful explanation. The parables contain cryptic allusions and hidden meanings to which we have no clue, problems we can never solve. But they contain, also, a wealth of usable practical wisdom such as we can appropriate, and be helped and blessed thereby.

In every instance, when it is furnished in the Scriptures, place of honour is given to Jesus' own interpretation of the parables. His larger concern, of course, was to advance the interest and make known the character of the Kingdom of God. But the Master knew full well, that

what takes place and that will take place, on the stage of the world, was also being enacted on a smaller scale, in the lives of men and women who thronged about Him. Realizing this, He always sought to connect His teaching with practical, everyday living. It is with the events of this smaller scale rather than with the happenings on the larger, that this volume of studies has to do.

The plan adopted is that of taking them in the order in which they appear in the Gospels, and the method adopted admits of the parables being studied in any one of three ways. 1. Singly: each parable is made to tell its own story, just as a gem, while forming part of a glittering tiara, sheds forth its individual lustre. 2. In connection with the context. 3. In groups. Where single parables reflect various aspects of the same truth they are grouped together in one study. For example: "The Tower Builder" and "The King Going to War" are coupled in a consideration of "Counting the Cost," while "The Unjust Judge" and "The Pharisee and the Publican" are made the basis of some thoughts on "Getting Things By Prayer."

Limitations of space prevent a consideration of all the parables; but it is hoped that those which are omitted are, by reason of their affinity thereto, given representation by those which are included. These are now given to the public, in the fervent hope that they will have some small share in maintaining and even increasing an interest in the study of the parables of our Lord.

H. T. S.

New York, N. Y.

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I

THE TWO FOUNDATIONS

Matthew 7: 24–27

CHOICES IN CHARACTER

The First Parable, recorded in Matthew, deals with the necessity of laying a good foundation. It is the best kind of an introduction to all the parables. The stability of building, profession, business, occupation, or character, depends upon the strength of its groundwork. If there is any weakness, here, it is sure to be revealed, in due time, in the superstructure.

The Point Made, in this conclusion, in The Sermon on the Mount, was very much in order for Christ's immediate hearers. It is equally pertinent to-day. In the body of this discourse there are set forth ideals, principles and precepts, which, if accepted and followed, will set up the kingdom of heaven upon this earth. Here are also pointed out the ways of success and failure for the individual. Man is left to make his choice of a character. According as he chooses he takes his place with the wise man or the foolish man. The first named looks, not only to the near but the far future, and makes his preparations not to have his life structure overturned by storms sure to come. The second man has no care as to what may come and miserably perishes in the floods that are merciless. It is an everyday story, written large in the daily news.

Jesus was very practical, when He said, " Therefore who-

soever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

The Physical Setting is well worth our attention. It is a colourful and interesting picture. Here is a great natural amphitheatre, up in the side of a mountain, near the Sea of Galilee. A great multitude of disciples is assembled from near and from far. The people, in their bright Oriental garments, form a picturesque crowd. There is constant movement in the groups of men and women. All seem to be talking at once. But, now, when the Master Teacher takes His place, and begins to speak, the multitude quickly hushes to silence.

The Speaker and Teacher, Jesus, is no recluse. In these early days of His ministry, He is very popular. The Gospel writers speak enthusiastically of the immense throngs of people which followed Him, listened to His words and saw His marvelous works of healing. Everything is done in the open. His fame grows with startling rapidity. His name is on every tongue. John the Baptist has roused the whole of Palestine by proclaiming Him as the long expected Messiah. Galilee, where Jesus now is, crossed by great Oriental caravan routes, is a good place to make His mission known to the peoples beyond. "There followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan" (Matt. 4: 25).

The Significance of The Sermon on the Mount

(Matt. chaps. 5, 6 and 7) which precedes the parable of "The Two Foundations," lies in the necessity which presses upon Jesus to tell the people just what His principles are. In order to understand the parable, the three chapters of this sermon ought to be read and carefully studied. It is difficult for us to realize, in our day, how very radical this new doctrine of Jesus' was to the Jew of that time. He believed that the outward observance of the Law of Moses was the thing for him. His religion had to do with forms and ceremonies. He failed when he did not obey its rules and regulations to the very letter. It was not a matter of heart but of punctilious conformity. His religion had become a shell. So long as he kept the shell clean and polished, he could retire within it, and think what he pleased. Jesus proclaims a new thing under the sun! A religion of the heart is set forth, and not one of cut and dried rules. It has to do with inward purity and righteousness. The temple of God is within, and here He must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Here is where the doctrine of Jesus rises superior to the Jewish and all other religions. No wonder "the people were astonished at his doctrine" (Matt. 7: 28). In Matthew 5, the keynote is sounded of this new view in "The Beatitudes." Blessedness is of the heart and inner life. Purity, peace, mercy, love, faith—these must have their dwelling here, or they are but a vain show of pretences. In Matthew 6, we are told that almsgiving, prayer and fasting must not be paraded in public, to win approval of the passers-by, but be performed in secret that God alone may see and like them. In chap. 7, we are reminded that as we judge so shall we be judged. In all this discourse the emphasis is placed upon the right attitude in the inner life. It is the spirit in which a thing is done that counts.

The Rock Foundation and the Sand Foundation. In this conclusion of His sermon, in a few short sentences

(Matt. 7: 24–27) Jesus makes His meaning very clear. He leaves no opportunity for the misinterpretation of the message He has just given.

First. He stresses the fact that there is a vast difference between hearing and doing. Listening to the setting forth of the best things, and the way to accomplish them, is of no use whatever, unless there is an effort to embody them in life. "Life's real meaning is determined by its deeds. The development of personal character depends upon action. It is what we do more than what we see or feel that determines what we are or what we become." It is the thing that we carry out that counts.

Second. Our attention is turned to foundation work. Upon what does our "doing" rest? What is the motive that prompts to action? It is worse than useless to erect an expensive building upon a poor foundation. Yet this is what is frequently done. The president of a big New York City bank, eminently qualified for his position by natural talent and education, became a moral bankrupt and had to resign. A great surgeon, at the head of his profession in a southern city, left overnight because it was brought out that he was thoroughly bad in his morals.

The Rock Foundation. What is it? We know what it is from the builder's standpoint. He knows that, for the utmost stability, he must seek the solid rock. The bigger the structure to be erected, the deeper he must go. This is true of human character; it must have something substantial upon which to rest. Man, in this, is putting up that which ought to stand not only for time but for eternity. Jesus presents, "these sayings of mine" (Matt. 7: 24) as the rock upon which to build. He declares in John 14: 6, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Paul, in I Corinthians 3: 11, asserts, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Why this

dependence on the Christ? Among many others there are five good reasons:

First. He can bring us into harmony with God. One great trouble with men is that they are at "outs" with God. They need to get "into line" with Him.

Second. He can bring us into harmony with our fellowmen. The only way in which human strife can be ended, is to make men feel true brotherliness.

Third. He can bring us into harmony with our circumstances so that we shall not continually chafe against the restrictions of our lives.

Fourth. He can bring us into harmony with ourselves so that there shall not be a continual conflict, within, between good and evil. He alone can drive out the evil, if we will trust Him.

Fifth. It is beginning to be realized that Jesus was eminently practical in His teachings, and that they can be applied successfully to the solutions of the problems of wealth, the industrial and commercial worlds, and the government. What is most needed, to-day, is the spirit of brotherliness, of stewardship, of service and of goodwill; the lack of which makes all the trouble.

The Sand Foundation. It is the absence of one or more of the above five elements of harmony. Men do not go down under the stress and storm of life for lack of intellectual and physical vigour. For the most part, it is because of the loss of moral heart-stamina. A visit to our courts and prisons will bear out this contention.

Tests for the Wise Man and the Foolish Man. The winds and the rains and the floods have no favourites. No one can escape tribulations; they come alike to all; they are hard to bear; they try men's souls to the uttermost.

Before men are tested it is difficult to judge human foundations. In this "beforetime," one man looks and

acts very much like any other man. A showy career may be erected upon a flimsy foundation. It seems all right. What is beneath does not show. But, now, let the winds of trouble loose! Let the floods of unexpected disaster rise! Let the storm rage in fury! Here is a condition of things which is constantly occurring. The strength or weakness of the bedrock convictions of men are brought to light. Men, whom we expected to stand, go down. Men, whom we expected to go down, stand.

We need to cultivate reserve power for unexpected happenings. A building, a bridge, a ship are made to have strength beyond their ordinary needs for sudden strains upon their resistance which will try them to the utmost. This is true of physical reserve. Two men were in an automobile accident. Both injured about the same. They were taken to a hospital. One the doctors declared had no chance to live. The other, the same doctors said, would get well. Why? One had abused his body sorely. He had no physical reserve. The other had taken care of his physical tenement. Here is a case of intellectual reserve: Two men went in for the examination for a certain very desirable position. They had an equal natural ability. One failed badly. The other succeeded splendidly. Why? One had made no preparation. The other had prepared himself, and he needed it, for the stiff examination. Jesus is uttering a plea, in this parable, for the cultivation of a spiritual reserve. Why do so many make a failure of life who seem so well equipped to make large successes? There are so many tragedies! They fall before some temptation which ought not to have been allowed upon the doorstep of their heart. It is even more necessary to cultivate a spiritual reserve power than a physical or intellectual one. For a wreck in morals means a total loss of everything that makes a man worth while. Hence the urgency of Jesus, everywhere expressed, of placing

our lives in the care of God and seeking to have them stay there. The wise man and the foolish man are with us to-day. We see their careers constantly worked out.

Choices in Character. This is what this parable means in the language of to-day. We may not choose a great many things. We have no say in the matter as to when and where we shall be born—rich or poor, of a family of high or low degree. We may come into this world with great or little talent. But there is one thing which is within the power of every one to control—personal character. This selection is more important than that of a career. This is the point that Jesus is making. He is telling us just what to do, in The Sermon on the Mount—to make good in life. We have many choices as to an occupation but there are but two possible ones in character—the good and the bad. To be sure there are gradations but they go up or down. We make our own selection, in our own hearts.

Questions. What can be said of the first parable, recorded in Matthew? Give the point made. What is its physical setting? What can be said of its speaker? What is the significance of The Sermon on the Mount which precedes this parable? What does Jesus stress in the rock and sand foundation? Give the five reasons in the rock foundation. What can be said of the tests for the wise man and the foolish man? What is meant by the choices in character?

II

THE SOWER

Matthew 13: 1–23, Mark 4: 1–20

FOUR KINDS OF HEARERS

The Problem Presented, in the Parable of the Sower, is that of getting a proper hearing for the truth. The version used is that of Matthew. Jesus is speaking from a little ship to a multitude of people standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Looking just beyond this multitude, He might have seen the whole process of seed-sowing which He describes.

Here He comes face to face with the difficulty of getting a lodgment in the hearts of the people of the things which He wishes them to heed and act upon. This is a hard fact which must be dealt with, and He proceeds to take it up and consider it.

This matter, in certain puzzling questions, is before us to-day. Why does so much of Christian effort appear to go to waste? Why is so much money spent in philanthropic enterprises, with such small results in bringing about better living conditions? Why do churches, in certain localities, seem to fail, when they appeared to be well planted? Why do some young men and women, brought up in the best homes and under all sorts of good influences, go to the bad? There are many other questions of this sort, which are very perplexing.

Jesus points out the fact that the sower of the seed—the parent, the teacher or the preacher—may not be at fault, as it is sometimes charged. The instruction is right as the seed is good. All has been done at the proper time, or season, that could be done.

The trouble, in the lack of a harvest, is in the way which the seed of instruction is received. This is a secular as well as a religious problem. The best teachers, aided by most improved methods, cannot force truths into the minds of pupils unwilling to receive them. You cannot get water into a tightly corked bottle, even by immersing it in water. This is a condition of things—resistance to good teaching—with which teachers, in their classes, come daily into contact. There are boys and girls, young men and women, as well as older persons, who resent and resist any attempt at betterment no matter how desirable it may seem. Herein lies the tragic power of the human will. It is like hard and unresponsive soil that will not permit even the best seed to germinate. This fact has not been taken into account, as Jesus takes it into account, in charging failure against the home, the school and the Church.

There Are Four Kinds of Hearers, which are typified in the four different sorts of soil, in this parable. Jesus shows how and why seed is wasted, when sown on unresponsive ground. The conditions must be changed before any harvest can be reaped.

First. Hard-surfaced people—the wayside soil kind. No farmer would think of sowing grain on a road, or pathway, beaten hard by passing traffic. Here are the people who are sufficient unto themselves. They propose to take no advice or instruction from anyone. If you talk to them, while they may possibly listen or appear to listen, they do not heed what you say. They may go to church but they come away with not the least idea of what the preacher has said. Such a man went to church with his wife. As they came out, the wife said, "What a fine sermon!" "Was it?" answered the man. "What was the topic?" "'The Necessity for Faith in Everyday Matters,'" replied the woman. "I'm sorry," her husband

continued, " but to tell you the truth, I didn't hear a word of it. You know that new automobile I bought yesterday! All the time the minister was preaching I was thinking what a fine car it was and how much enjoyment I was going to get out of it." A boy went to Sunday school, after an exciting game of baseball on Saturday afternoon. He was so full of this game that his teacher talked in vain. His sister had a birthday party arranged for the Monday night following, and could think of nothing but that occasion and what she was going to wear. The lesson hour was wasted on that boy and girl. If the value of a thing is not realized, no offering of it can do any good. A man once made a wager with a friend that he would take a tray, place upon it ten gold sovereigns, and stand for two hours, on London Bridge, during the city's busiest hours, and offer these gold coins at a shilling apiece and have no buyers. He won his wager. This non-attentive condition of the hearer, in order to get truth into the mind, is not taken into account as it ought to be.

Second. Easily excited, enthusiastic people—the thin-soil-over-rock kind. The stony places, with a thin layer of dirt, form excellent places for the quick germination of seed sown there. Wonderful results are promised only to lead to great disappointments.

Every good movement knows this sort of people, where it reaches the stage of its presentation to the public, for approval. A meeting is called in some large church or hall. Workers and funds are sought. Under the influence of soul-stirring speakers, all are quickened to do their utmost. Names of workers are handed in freely. Funds are liberally subscribed. The thing is about to go over in great shape. But alas, in too many cases, the movement ends right there. The men and women who have put down their names, as workers, find that they have engagements which will prevent their carrying out

their promises. Many of the subscribers cry off. You will hear ministers talk of men and women who joined their church and promised to be of so much help, and were never heard of again. A wealthy woman said to her new pastor, "You can absolutely rely upon me to carry out any work in which I agree to engage." The pastor was delighted. He told it to one of his trustees who dryly remarked that this woman was noted for her great enthusiasms with very small undertakings. One reason why the national revival movements, at one time very effective, have ceased, is that they were killed by this sort of people.

Third. Preoccupied people—the seed that fell among thorns. Here we have a fine soil. There is nothing the matter with it. It is capable of producing large results. But it is preoccupied. A man is so absorbed in a business enterprise that he has no thought or time for anything else. He does not even look out for his family. He does not know what his children are doing, except in a general way. His son gets into bad company and some minor trouble, and his father has to get him out. Even then, the man does not follow up the matter, and his son finally breaks all bounds. His daughter marries a man who soon deserts her. As for taking heed to the needs of his spiritual life they are farthest from his thoughts. There is no chance here to get in any good seed of care for family or God. It's a sad fact, yet true, that this condition is brought home to us in the news of every day. Men and women sow such a sad crop of thorns of personal, purely personal, selfish interests on good ground that you cannot touch them. A young man once came to Christ, in this condition of having immense possessions. He was offered a discipleship. But the thorns had so choked the ground that he went his way after making the great refusal. It is strange that such people can see so much

profit in purely worldly matters, but in spiritual concerns, where there is the greatest gain to be made for self and others, they are worse than blind.

Fourth. The receptive people—the seed that "fell into good ground and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (Matt. 13: 8). We ought not to forget, and this parable reminds us, that there are great multitudes of honest, upright, truthful, enthusiastic people who are splendid soil for the Word of God. They gladly listen and as gladly put in practice what they hear. They are the ones who are behind all our benevolent enterprises, who sustain our churches and Sunday schools, and are first and foremost in every worthy cause. The fact has been demonstrated, time and again, that the men and women who are really doing the big things, in life, are followers of the Christ.

In every company there will be found these four kinds of people. If there is an undue proportion of the first three, the speaker, or teacher, will find it difficult to make any headway. The response will be very meagre to any Christian truth which he may present. Here is the reason for the failure of many fine expositions of the truth. If most of the people present are of the fourth kind the speaker will find his work a pleasant and easy task.

Look to the Soil in Which You Propose to Sow Seed. In this parable, Jesus Christ shows that He thoroughly understood human nature. He calls our attention, in the most emphatic way, to the fact that we must find suitable soil for the sowing of the Gospel seed or it will be wasted. Too much effort is spent in trying to do things for which no preparation has been made. No results, worth while, can be harvested until the preliminary work has been done of getting the ground ready to receive the seed. A farmer would not think of putting in his grain before he had made ready for it. Various kinds of

ground need different preparations. It is utterly useless, likewise, to present Christian truth to those who have no use for it and will spurn it. It is useless to talk up our religion without a thought of how it will be received. We only cheapen that which we hold most precious. There is a new movement, in the Christian Church, that of religious education, which proposes to present its truths, in such a way, that the soil will be prepared for the welcome reception of the good seed of the Word.

The encouraging fact is brought out, that there is plenty of good ground which will repay cultivation and which will bring forth abundantly. No pastor ever started out to visit his field of work and became acquainted with his families—really acquainted—but found this to be true. The Home and Foreign Missionary Societies of the different denominations tell us, that they have more work before them, open and ready, than they have workers with which to accomplish it. The great cry to-day, is for men and women who are willing to aid in putting in the seed. It is surprising how readily people respond to the Gospel message, when it is rightly placed before them.

Questions. What is the problem of The Sower? What are certain questions before us to-day in regard to the seeming failure of Christian effort? How does Jesus handle this matter? What are the four kinds of hearers typified? What of the hard-surfaced people? The easily excited? The preoccupied? The receptive? What can be said of these sorts of people being found in every audience? What can be said of looking to the soil in which we propose to sow seed? What is the encouraging fact brought out in this parable?

III

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

Matthew 13: 24–30, 36–43

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The Fact of the Mingling of the Evil With the Good is a condition of things which everywhere confronts us. It is always with us. It is a practical question of everyday life. It is manifest in all grades of society, all forms of government, in the home, and in the Church. No matter how thorough we make our reforms, or how harshly our courts may deal with law-breakers, seeds of corruption seem to find lodgment and grow to noxious weeds in the cleared fields.

Jesus Faced This Difficult Situation in the parable before us. His teaching here is worthy of the most painstaking study. He does not leave the matter hanging in the air. He presents certain definite conclusions, which, taken out of their Oriental forms, are workable to-day.

The Story is that of a man who prepared his field and sowed it for wheat. Not long after, a man who had a spite against the owner, sowed it on a dark night for tares. While the wheat was maturing, the tares also showed themselves. In the earlier stages of growth it was quite impossible to tell them apart. When the servants of the householder saw what had come to pass they reported the matter to their master and asked him if they should try to separate the wheat from the tares? The reply of the owner was to the effect that an enemy had sowed the tares and that the best course to follow, so as not to root up the wheat, was to wait until the harvest

before making the separation, by burning the tares and gathering the wheat into the barn. Read the parable and the explanation (Matt. 13: 24–30, 36–43).

The Main Question is the Problem of Evil. What is the evil that so troubles the world? Whence does it come? What makes it such an active force for destruction? From whom, or from what, does it derive its strength? It is easy to ask a multitude of such questions. The answers are legion but it is difficult to make them satisfactory, so many things are involved. To attempt to go into them, at all fully, is aside from our purpose. But a close study of the lesson, before us, will shed much light on this subject and reveal firm standing-ground. This is the thing that we are after, rather than endless and useless discussions.

There Are Certain Warnings in This Parable which must always be taken into account.

Evil exists and persists, and it is not good in the making. Wheat and tares grow from different kinds of seeds. This is not a matter which can be put aside with a wave of the hand. The sooner men recognize that there is a power, in this world, which seeks their destruction, the better it will be for them. The enemy, spoken of in the parable, is at work. He has many names. In a recent play he is spoken of as "Hate." Well, call him that, if you choose. Under this guise, everyone knows what he does, and it is never with any benevolence or kindness of heart. "Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?"

Evil parades and pretends. It never, at the first, presents its real character. It is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It always hides its real nature until it is ready to strike down its victim. It is not modest or shrinking. Men, who are bad at heart, at the root, will look you squarely in the eye and often smile most kindly. Men leading

double lives are often most affable in manner, and appear to be perfect gentlemen. No one could tell, after the enemy had sown the tares, that they were there, and, in coming up, they imitated, and looked like wheat. They were *taken* for wheat. The high-class confidence man works his nefarious schemes by his pretences. Here is the danger, and it is one point in this parable not generally recognized.

The Trouble in the Wheat-Field is the work of an enemy. He is not an honourable man who differs from a friend and openly and boldly opposes him. He is of the sneak-thief variety who goes at night, while men sleep, and does all the damage he can in sowing tares in a freshly planted grain field. One of the worst things about this matter is that the damage cannot be detected and remedied at once, but must wait and so do more harm.

Who is this enemy? It is difficult to conceive who he is. We know that he is active to-day in doing damage, much damage, in the world. We know him by his works. That there is some active evil force at work in the world seems to be beyond question. In a meeting, not long since, a man asked a great popular preacher, who invited questions, "Don't you think that the devil is dead?" "It may be so," was the reply, "but if he is, there is someone else carrying on a very active business at the same old stand." The fact of evil in the world cannot be denied. Its destructive effects are everywhere seen. It is not only a religious but a scientific, a psychological and philosophical matter of investigation. The Church, society, even civilization itself—all are fighting it.

God, the Householder, to whom the grain field is represented as belonging, sowed good seed. There are all sorts of theories which represent God as having, in some way, a responsibility for the evil in the world. But nowhere in the Bible is any such theory sanctioned. He is

always spoken of as having a horror of evil. He is pure and holy, and forever urging man to conform to His just and righteous laws and ways. He is not the author of evil in any sense, and Jesus desires, in this parable, to make this point very clear.

The Tares Were Sown While Men Slept. The very fact that men are given freedom to choose between right and wrong, makes possible much of the evil in the world. This evil, being chosen, multiplies and grows upon what it feeds. We know that one man can corrupt a whole community. We know that a small and insignificant seed-thought of wrong-doing, given a lodgment and a welcome in a man's heart, can attain such strength and vigour as to do an untold amount of damage. This is brought out, every day, in the trials of criminals. If all men would turn to God, and obey Him, evil would disappear. "While men slept." They paid no heed, and did not care to take any trouble to stay awake. In the meantime the enemy sowed tares which in due time were harvested. "That which has its entrance through human sin must have its outlet through human misery." Here is man's part in the mounting wrongs, that make the world such a hard place in which to live. The tares drive out the wheat.

The Delayed Judgment. When the householder was told by his servants that tares had appeared in his field he knew at once what had happened. He gave orders, however, that nothing should be done until the grain and the tares had fully ripened. Everything should have time to be fully worked out. God does not hasten His judgment. Everyone is given a fair opportunity to work out his purposes to the end. We see this state of things every day. Evil seems to flourish unchecked alongside the good, which does not seem to be rewarded in any way. The mean man goes on in his meanness, and noth-

ing is done about it, save that he becomes worse as he sees no punishment allotted to him. The criminal, untaken, plots again and again against society. Another reason for delayed judgment is that in families, in society, and in all the relations of life, good and evil are so bound up together that any radical measures will cause harm to those who are striving to live the sort of life of which God approves. At the request of Lot, was not Sodom spared, for the sake of a few righteous in it, until Lot could plead no longer? God has such a long time in which to work that He desires to extend His mercy unto the uttermost. There is no parable that shows God's desire to help men so fully as this. Men are all impatient to get things done at once. They desire that judgment be pronounced immediately. Lynch law is sometimes resorted to, because men think the ordinary course of justice moves too slowly. But God will not be hurried. He will take His time. He will make sure that every man have his day in court, and that every witness, for or against him, shall be heard. In this final court, money or influence will not count; the root principle, as found in the man himself, will be the thing tested and constitute the deciding factor.

The Surety of the Harvest. This is what makes the householder so undisturbed when he is told that tares have been sowed in his field. He is certain of the results. He knows that he can take care of both the tares and the wheat. The servants are anxious and worried because they do not see their way to a solution of the matter.

The problem of evil, which seems to us so difficult of understanding, may be to God no problem at all. Everything is under His hand and He knows just what He is going to do. The storm, which is so terrifying to the passengers, is not the same to the captain of a ship. He is in command, and knows what to do and how to do it. God knows that evil cannot triumph and that, in the end,

it must be destroyed. All things are in His hands. Good and evil are certain to have their reward, in kind. Read Jesus' own interpretation of this parable and be assured (Matt. 13: 36–43).

The Near Harvest. The time of gathering in the grain, in any field, is not far off when it begins to ripen. Judgments are being continually worked out for men and women in certain allotted areas. We see wrongs which flourished like green bay-trees, and defied all attempts to cut them down, swiftly abolished as were the tares. Reforms, which everyone declared impossible, suddenly come into their own.

The Far Harvest—the end of the ages; the accounting when all things shall be reckoned up. This far harvest extends beyond the lifetime of one man and of many men. One may do good or harm, which will continue to bear fruit for hundreds of years, after his body has turned to dust. What shall be the verdict? Our Lord Jesus Christ, did His work, on this earth, centuries ago; but the harvest of His life is not yet gathered in. Who can estimate its increase, in the ages yet to come?

Take nations: Their work is not to be reckoned in the space of a few years. When the Israelitish prophets lived, they were greatly troubled and perplexed over the harm done by Assyria, Babylonia and other nations, which flaunted their wickedness in the face of God and men. Where are they to-day? Gone up for judgment, and found wanting. The God they defied is still directing the universe from His throne; and modern nations are being looked over, to ascertain whether they are wheat or tares.

Questions. What can be said of the fact of the mingling of good and evil? How did Jesus face this difficult situation? Give the story of the parable. What is the main question in the problem of evil? What are certain warnings about evil? Give the two. What is the trouble in the wheat-

field? What can be said of God, the householder? What of the sowing of tares while men slept? What is delayed judgment? What can be said of the surety of the harvest? What can be said of the near, and of the far harvest?

IV

THE MUSTARD SEED

Matthew 13: 31, 32

MATERIAL GROWTH

The Future of Christ's Kingdom! What will it be? Will this kingdom increase or decline? It is a matter which is much discussed. It was of very great interest to the immediate followers of Christ, when He was on the earth. The disciples were continually asking Him to unroll, for them, the map of the future. They wanted to know what was going to come to pass. Jesus did not hesitate to reply to their questions. In His replies, we cannot find one doubtful word as to the ultimate success of His cause. Just before His death, when He positively knew that He must be crucified, His confidence did not waver. In Matthew 25, He declares that all things are in His hands; that there will be obstacles to be overcome; that there will be backsets, but that the triumphant outcome is certain. After His resurrection He sends out His disciples to conquer, in His name, not one, but all nations (Matt. 28: 18–20; Acts 1: 8). This belief, received, accepted and acted upon, accounts for the many glorious victories of early Christianity.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is right in line with this idea of the great material advancement of Christ's kingdom. It was uttered when Jesus was at the height of His popularity. In it, there is to be heard a strong note of encouragement. It differs from that of its twin, "The Leaven," in that there we have brought out the idea of spiritual expansion. (See the next study.) The

text reads, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

There Are Four Aspects of the Kingdom set forth in this brief yet most suggestive passage of Holy Scripture.

First. The small beginning. The mustard seed is notably insignificant. There is nothing about it that appears to promise anything worth while. Jesus had difficulty in making His followers realize what He was about (Luke 4: 14–30). Even Nathanael said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1: 46). The value of small things is here clearly set forth. Jesus seems to anticipate modern science in insisting on the strength lodged in little things to accomplish large results. The bacteriologist is persistently telling us that the battle for our physical life is being fought out, on a microscopic scale. The contest for our moral and spiritual health is also waged within—in the hidden way. What is fought out here will presently come to the light and manifest itself, for good or evil, in deeds known to all. Palestine, the field in which Christ planted the seed of His Gospel, is not large. It is a long way from the city of Rome. Who, of the mighty rulers, of Jesus' day, took thought of what was being done in that obscure province; or if they did, cared a jot?

Second. The vitality of the seed. It persisted in doing what was bound up in it, and what it was set to do, in spite of a poor soil, a bad climate and unfavourable circumstances. This is the sort of seed that everyone who tills the ground is seeking. Archimedes said, "Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world." But the Jews determined not to let Christ have a place to stand.

They rejected Him as their Messiah, although He was sent to them, and crucified Him. They incited the Romans against Him. After His resurrection, they drove His disciples away from Jerusalem. All this, is a matter of history. But nevertheless, and notwithstanding, the vitality of the seed would not be denied. It found a place in which to root itself and grow, as it has grown up, for the healing and blessing of the nations. Attention cannot be too strongly directed to the fact that nothing can sap the vigorous life of the kingdom of Christ.

Third. The growth. After he had done his part in planting it, the man who knew what a mustard seed could do, looked forward confidently to the time it should attain its full height. Christ foresaw what His kingdom was going to accomplish. He never expressed a doubt as to the results. We have a growing religion. It is a matter of fact, of which the proof is everywhere, that when one people does not keep pace with it, it goes to another people that will follow more closely its advancing step. Many nations have risen and fallen, since Christianity had its birth, but it has never ceased to go forward.

Fourth. Useful greatness. "The birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." This Christian tree attracts the best thoughts, ideals and purposes of men. It affords a resting-place and a shelter for them. It is a high meeting-place. Men are made real kin to each other, not by a commonly worn dress or badge of nationality, but by the nature and character of what they think and purpose in their hearts. Men go forward, not by catering to the lower, or earthly, part in themselves but by looking up to the higher things. There can be no better service, or more useful, than that which the kingdom of Christ offers, as the rallying-place for our noblest aspirations.

Five Reasons for the Growth of Christ's King-

dom. We are always looking for the causes for the ongoing of things. We ask and ask rightly, how did Christianity get such a hold upon the world? Why does it keep its grip? Let us look at some of the reasons which can be stated very plainly.

First. The right leader and leadership. More depends, in any enterprise, upon the one in charge, than in anything else. Is he equal to his task? Can he overcome the hardest difficulties? Can he continually make advances where they ought to be made? A great business house, or corporation, will do everything possible to get a man who can measure up to their requirements and be master of any and all situations. If one ask the question, "What made possible the great enterprise we call Christianity?" there is but one answer—the leadership of Jesus Christ. Without Him, there would be a blank, where now exists such a wonderful record in the history of mankind. He did the work which no one else could do. This is a hard, cold fact. Without Him, the apostles would have given up. When He died on the Cross, the apostles were ready to quit. But He came again to them as a living leader. He is a living leader *now*. "Lo, I am with you alway," He declared, "even unto the end of the world." Time and again has it been demonstrated, in trying crises of the Church, that Jesus Christ is still its living Head. The victories are His victories, and His the glory.

Second. A living faith that uplifts and saves. Not that it simply did marvellous things for men many hundreds of years ago about which we can read and wonder! That was a good thing, but there is something further to be asked: what can it do, *to-day*, for me? The reply is that it can do just exactly what it did long ago. Millions of men and women testify, to-day, to a living faith in Jesus Christ; that He is with them and continually helps them. If this were not true, Christianity would go down to ob-

livion, overnight! There is a Christ of history, the story of One who lived in Palestine long ago. There is also a Christ of present-day experience, and He is the One who does us good, in the present hour. It is not difficult to know Him. He wants to know *us*. He seeks us. We have only to be willing to let Him come into our hearts, and He will gladly come.

Third. A church that seeks to be of service. Take the most inadequate organization of this sort yet, at heart, it has the redemption of men from evil. It works to end the rule of evil, and to bring in the kingdom of righteousness. It is maligned and abused by those who do not want to see its ideals realized. There is not an organization, in any community, which is working for the welfare of the people, that has not had its inception in some church.

Fourth. A book of spiritual history, the Bible, which tells us of God's plans, hopes and desires for us. It is not a book of good advice, or hard rules difficult to observe, but one in which good news is heralded. The good news that the Great Power at the head of all things, is not unfriendly but friendly, and that He seeks our welfare. This is what makes the Bible the most popular and the best-selling book in the world. All efforts to belittle the Bible and to get it out of the world fail, simply because it brings to mankind this wonderful message of a God who cares for the creatures His hand hath made.

Fifth. The long look ahead. Everyone wants to know what lies beyond the grave. Do we end there? Is there nothing else to hope for? We are compelled to think on this subject. We may put it away but it comes back. Jesus Christ was very positive on the subject of a future life. On many occasions, He asserted that there was a life beyond the grave, that all was not ended there. When He raised Lazarus from the dead, He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." At the last supper He said,

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14: 1, 2).

Some Facts Which Show the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom. We need not go back to Christ's time. We take the period from the close of the eighteenth century to the present day. Through Christianity we note the marked improvement. Let us look back.

In the government of cities. London is a typical example. Its streets were unlighted and unpaved. Bandits and murderers roamed about, in armed bands, unchecked by the authorities. In Paris they abolished Sunday with its religious services, wrote over the cemetery gates, "Death is an eternal sleep," and crowned a notorious courtesan as the Goddess of Reason, in the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

Labour conditions. Men worked from twelve to fifteen hours a day. Women were used, as mules are now, to draw coal-cars in the mines. There were no public schools and children were sent to work at six years of age.

Slavery existed everywhere. One-sixth of the people in the United States were slaves. For some years after the opening of the nineteenth century any Englishman might sell his wife into slavery. Twenty-six acts of the British Parliament approved slavery.

Drinking and gambling. Both were everywhere sanctioned. Drunkenness was one of the things to be expected of any man. A greater part of the state revenues was derived from gambling, which was openly licensed.

Sense of justice was dulled. A man could say of his wife, "She is part of my goods and chattels." He could beat her when he liked. She had no redress. There were no laws for the protection of children from any sort of

abuse. English law recognized over one hundred crimes punishable by death.

Human kindness. The brutalities of war are indescribable. Prisoners taken in battle were sold as slaves.

Educational institutions. In Yale College, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, under President Dwight, there were but four students who were counted as Christian communicants. In Harvard College, the students delighted to call themselves by the names of prominent French infidels.

Religious matters. Missions, in 1800, were very weak. There were only seven missionary societies, spending about $125,000 a year. Now there are over one hundred and fifty such societies, spending at least $75,000,000 a year, and having over 5,000,000 converts.

Bad as are the abuses of our own times—they *are* bad—we have only to consider the above facts to realize how Christianity is growing and helping the world to better things. It is only through the fight made by Christians, in the name of Christ, that this has been accomplished.

Questions. What can be said in regard to the future of Christ's kingdom? What of the parable of the mustard seed? What are the four aspects of Christ's kingdom? The small beginning; the vitality of the seed; the growth; useful greatness? What are the five reasons for the growth of the kingdom? Leader and leadership; living faith; a church of service; a Book of spiritual history; the long look ahead? What are some facts which show the advancement of the kingdom? The government of cities; labour conditions; slavery; drinking and gambling; sense of justice; human kindness; educational institutions; religious matters?

V

THE LEAVEN IN THE MEAL

Matthew 13: 33

THE INWARD POWER

The Development of Inward Power, to produce the best outward results, is the subject of this parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. 13: 33). Here was something which worked from the inside out, not from the outside in. It was a service, not made hard by a set of taxing rules and regulations, but made easy and joyous by being in accord with the desire of the heart.

There is a great difference between doing something that you want to do, and being compelled to do it. We see people bearing comparatively light burdens, who chafe and complain bitterly of what they have to endure. We note other people carrying much heavier loads who are cheerful and happy, and who never complain. The reason of this is not far to seek. It is in the leaven of the spirit, the inward power of faith and good cheer, which lightens the sodden mass of the meal of their lives. Jesus, in this story, as in all His teachings, is very practical.

The Great Need of To-day, is a right heart attitude to good causes and also to the evil ones. When there is no such interest, the power goes off and the machinery stops. "Out of the heart are the issues of life. We see churches and institutions, which were founded by people who worked hard for them, go down, not because they have passed their usefulness; far

from it. The reason is that no one cares any more about them. Reforms, begun with a great blare of trumpets, and which did a world of useful service, languish and die in the same way. Evils arise and flourish like green bay-trees. They damage individuals, the home, society and state, but nothing is done to check them. Crimes increase and there seems to be a total indifference to their ravages. There are plenty of laws, with good sharp teeth in them, but no disposition to employ them, and make them effective.

But let the leaven of private and public conscience begin to work, and very soon an inward power is developed, before which no outward wrong, no matter how strong or well entrenched, can stand. The evils go, and stand not upon the order of their going.

Hedge the individual about with the most rigid restrictions, and he will break over, or through them all, if he please to do so. He refuses to be coerced. But let him have a change of heart; let him be converted to the right of things, and he will, of himself, clean up his own life. He responds to the new impulse within him, as he will to no outward pressure.

The Kingdom of Heaven, or of God. What is it? It is that which Jesus advocated and strove to establish. It is a kingdom that appeals to the heart and develops the inward Power, which really gets results that amount to something.

We are not left in doubt as to what it is, in the Scriptures. There are four conceptions of this kingdom. *First*—The reign of God over all creatures. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19: 1). *Second*—The reign of God over men and nations. "All that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all" (I Chron. 29: 11).

Third—The reign of God as divine love over human hearts, believing in Him and constrained thereby to yield Him grateful affection and devoted love. The special mission of Jesus Christ was to inaugurate and forward this reign of Divine love. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16). The two laws are love to God and love to man (Matt. 22: 36–40). *Fourth*—The reign of Christ, in judgment and glory, hereafter (Matt. 25: 31–46).

The Leaven Put in the Meal. It does not change the form of the loaf of bread. It does not make it over. It transforms it. It quickens and makes alive that which has no life of itself. The soddenness disappears. Jesus did not come proposing to make over society or the state into new and different forms. He knew, as we now know, that changes in governments and society often bring in evils, worse than those which were sought to be abolished. He did not make the mistake that is usually made, in writing the constitution for a new state, in that everything is sought to be governed by rigid laws which deal only with external things. He taught that before much can be done with the outside of things, the hearts of men must be changed. Make the hearts of men right and the institutions will take care of themselves. Let any man accept the reign of Divine love, over and in him, and the leaven will transform him. Our Lord here teaches that the change which He meant to effect in the world was a change, not so much in the outward form, as of the spirit and character of all things. Whether a person is easy or hard to get along with, depends not so much upon a high or low position, upon poverty or wealth, as upon their inner spirit of hatred or envy, kindness and love.

The Leaven Hid in the Meal. It is not always easy to get at the secret purpose of a man. We are often

balked in this effort, by a pretended, or imitation, leaven of goodness and truth. A man to gain certain evil ends, will protest that he loves his victim, with all his heart, when the fact is quite otherwise. We have ever to be on our guard.

Again we have the case of a man who, with a sincere and right purpose of heart, as the leaven, has a stubborn nature with which to deal. Here there is often the case of the slow process, the taking of some time, to transform the outward life to conform to the inward desire.

When, however, the leaven has really done its work there is and can be no question as to the outward results. The loaf of bread cannot conceal what has been done to it in its rising. No imitation can stand the comparison with the real. The secret purpose is made manifest.

The Meal. It represents the stuff of which life is made up; the physical part, the circumstances, the position, the wealth, the poverty and other ingredients. It is our task to manage, or mismanage, this host of things. How we do it, or do not do it, makes for our happiness or misery. We may get one or two, or more ingredients in their right place, in fine working order, but the others refuse to come into line. Here is a man who can make money, but he has a miserable home life and cannot get on with his fellowmen. Here is another man who has a good position but his physical condition is bad. There is always something to prevent the happiness to which every man aspires. Hence his pessimistic philosophy of life that there is no good in anything. To many people life seems hard and difficult or sodden. There is, they declare, no good in it. The Book of Ecclesiastes voices this view of life with its "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

Mixing the Leaven and the Meal. Let us understand this matter. The leaven does nothing of itself. The meal does nothing of itself. It is only when they are

mixed together that we have the inward rising power, that gets us the results we seek. A man may have the very best purpose in the world. He may think all sorts of kindly thoughts toward his fellowmen and yet live a miserable life with the meal of everyday happenings. Jesus Christ gave the only and best recipe for a happy and useful life when He told us that the kingdom of heaven was "like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened." One may say of a certain matter, "I know it is a good thing, I can do it"; but until he say "I will," nothing comes of it. There are those who patronize the reign of Divine love in heaven, and regard the leaven on earth as a good thing. There are those who speak of it as a splendid ideal. It is only those who attempt to carry it into action that find the kingdom of heaven here on earth, with no waiting for the hereafter. "The kingdom of heaven is within you," said the Master. The value of all right thinking is measured, finally, in terms of what it leads us to do. Further than this, knowledge of the kingdom of heaven is of real use only when it grips our life and has its issue in some worth-while work that makes for character. With this "mixing" life becomes a joy, with a magnificent outlook into the future.

"Till the Whole Was Leavened." There is a process of leavening going on in every man's heart who will accept and put to work the reign of Divine love. It is sometimes slow but it is sure. It will go on until all the ingredients of his life are brought into harmony with the will of God. It all depends upon a man's willingness, or unwillingness, to let this love do its appointed work.

There is a process of leavening going on in the world, at large, and three things are predicted, in the Bible, on the extent and fate of the kingdom of God.

First. That it will be progressive. Hundreds of years

before Christ came, Isaiah declared, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end" (9: 7). John the Baptist said, "He must increase" (John 3: 30). Jesus, Himself, never expressed a doubt as to the magnificent success of His cause (Matt. 28: 18–20; Luke 24: 45–53; Acts 1: 8).

Second. That it will be universal. Jesus claimed the world for His field, and commanded His disciples to "teach all nations" (Matt. 28: 19). One of the first things done was to detach His religion from Judaism. (Read how this was done in the Book of Acts, chaps. 10, 11 and 15.) Jesus refused to compromise with the mighty Roman Empire. Zechariah prophesied that "His dominion shall be from sea, even to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth" (9: 10).

Third. That it will be everlasting. Every other kingdom will pass away but this one will endure forever. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away" (Dan. 7: 13, 14). "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, which was, and which is to come" (Rev. 1: 8).

Questions. What can be said of development of inward Power as the subject of this parable? What is the great need of to-day? What is the kingdom of heaven? Give the four conceptions, set forth in the Scriptures. What is meant by the leaven; what does it do? What can be said of the leaven hid in the meal? What does the meal represent? What do we understand in regard to the mixing of the leaven with the meal? What can be said of the process of leavening, "Till the whole was leavened," going on in a man's heart? What can be said of the process of leavening going on in the world? What are the three things predicted, in the Bible, on the extent and fate of the kingdom of God?

VI

THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

Matthew 13: 44–46

THE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM

A Statement of Facts is made in this parable, and a condition of things described common to Palestine and throughout the East. It was customary for a man, through lack of banks, and on account of troublous times, to bury his money in his field. Sometimes he died without telling its hiding-place. Then some other man, renting the land and digging in it, would come unexpectedly upon this secret hoard. Greatly rejoicing he would willingly sell all he had and buy the field. Again: it was a time when the jewel-merchant flourished exceedingly. This was because precious stones, of large value, could easily be concealed and carried about the person. This man was constantly hunting for goodly pearls. He was willing, at any time, to part with the whole of his existing stock in order to secure an unusually valuable pearl. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." So runs the Scripture, in Matthew's Gospel.

The Value of the Kingdom of Heaven is brought out and strongly emphasized in these two parables. It is the one thing that counts, that is really worth while, whether it be suddenly found, or only after diligent

searching. The New Testament, everywhere, stresses the importance of this kingdom and the necessity of allegiance to it. It is the one great thing to be desired, that is, if a real success in life is wanted. Both the man who bought the field, and the jewel-merchant were shrewd business men, and, as the narrative shows, knew exactly what they were about. They proposed to acquire more than their money's worth.

The Claims of the Kingdom are Large. They ask for a thorough investigation. Everything is out in the open. There is nothing concealed. The precepts and principles ask for a thorough probing as to their strength and validity. The man who acquired the hidden treasure had an opportunity to examine it, beforehand, and at his leisure. His was no hasty action, based upon sudden impulse. Doubtless he counted his gold, more than once, and saw to it that judgment was not biased by a salesman, intent on making a large profit out of a sale of his commodity. The claims of this treasure were made upon their own intrinsic merits. The jewel-merchant had had his wits sharpened in many transactions. He had constantly to be on the lookout for jewels that were not up to standard, if he desired to remain in business. He did not buy the pearl of great price "sight unseen"; he was not that kind of a trader. He looked it over, handled it, tested it, and actually knew it to be worth, to him, the price asked.

The way men get ahead is not through guess-work, as to the claims of things they are asked to purchase or the causes that seek their support, but through exact knowledge of what they go into. The old precept of "Look before you leap," is always and everywhere a wholesome injunction.

The way men fail in business and in life, is in the neglect to look to the end of some apparently desirable

scheme or transaction, that presents itself for their approval and support. They do not investigate the true nature of things which promise large dividends and shun critical examination. Men seek fame, pleasure, wealth, power, position, even happiness itself, without looking into the foundations upon which they rest. When these collapse, as they do very frequently, they bemoan their ill-luck, when, as a matter of plain fact, they ought to condemn their own lack of foresight. A wise man once said, "Beware of a sin which pays its board in advance." Every good business man is wary of a proposed investment that offers unusually large dividends, without adequate security. He knows there is more than a mere possibility of his losing his principal.

The Standard Test of Worth is this kingdom of heaven, or of God. If the coins in the treasure-box could not bear the assay-tests, they were worthless. If the pearl of great price could not survive the strictest scrutiny, it was cast aside. Everything, sooner or later, gets tested. Man's test is his relation to the kingdom of heaven. One of the saddest sights in the world of human waste, is the man who has not tried to stand up to the test, who has gone his own way, only to find himself disillusioned, discouraged and disheartened with life, when they should be filled with the joy of living. It is not the outside things, the happy or unhappy circumstances of life, wealth, poverty, or position, that make for this joy, but what is inside the heart. "The kingdom of heaven," said Jesus, "is within you."

The Cost Was Great. Note the fact that the buyer of the field, where the treasure was hidden, and the pearl-merchant, both sold all they had. They stripped themselves of every cent they had in the world; they kept nothing back in order to get what they wanted. There is no mentioning of any bargaining or haggling over the

price. Maybe the reason why our religion does us so little good, and why we fail to get the results expected, is because we have offered "bargain-counter" prices for the treasure and the pearl, and we missed securing either, because they were not to be had on "reduction-price" terms. There was a young man who came to Christ at one time. He was very rich. He wanted to join the Master's company. Jesus put him to this test of the treasure and the pearl, and he failed to qualify. He went away, and was never heard of again.

The Profit Was Large. We are too apt to forget that there was great gain to be made in this transaction. Every page of the New Testament sets forth the profit side. The difference between a good business man and a poor one is often in this very regard. The first-named does not consider the cost to be incurred nearly so much as the profit that is to be made. Large sums mean little to him, when he can see a prospect of their bringing in still larger sums. The second man is afraid to venture a small sum of money, even in the face of guaranteed gains; because he looks solely at what he is called upon to pay, and not at what he will certainly receive. A young man, desiring to enter professional life, will spend, very gladly, eight or ten years in preparation in order to make a success in the end. No matter what our religion costs it is all coming back to us with manifold returns on our investment. The man got the field, with the treasure in it. The jewel-merchant got his pearl of great price. At one time Peter said unto Jesus, "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee," and Jesus answered and said: "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold, now in this time, houses and brethren, and sisters, and mothers,

and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10: 28–30).

Suppose Christianity should become universal? What an immediate gain there would be! The fear of impending warfare would be gone forever. We could dismiss all our armies, close up all our courts, and let go all our policemen. The question of a crime wave would not exist. There would be no criminals. Poverty would disappear and with it the question of the slums. This question of profit in Christianity is a large and a practical one. What keeps us back from this gain? The evil which we have allowed to overspread the land; and this we have need to eradicate, if we are to enjoy the blessings which are right at hand.

Personal Decision and Action are called for in regard to the kingdom of God. The treasure-man and the pearl-seeker asked no one to help them determine what to do. The things they sought seemed so desirable that they had no need to do so. In doubtful matters, they might have sought the advice of others, but not in a case like this. In the end, no matter what others may say or do, we must decide and act for ourselves. Acting with the mass, in matters that personally concern ourselves, is never satisfactory, especially such matters as are of a religious and moral character. One's sense of right, justice, truth, virtue, honour and loyalty to Christ, are the treasure and the pearl and they are most exceedingly precious. They are the worth-while things that make character. They are the things most to be desired in all the world. Without them, men are the poorest of the poor; with them, men rise, above every earthly handicap, to be God's noblemen, and are rich indeed.

The Joy that is Found in the Kingdom. The man who bought the field, in which he found the treasure, did it "for the joy thereof." There was no compulsion,

and no urging; there was no sense of duty, even, making him do what he did. He was only too glad to enter into possession and get the treasure. Too often this element of joy in possessing the kingdom is forgotten. Jesus Christ came upon this earth with good news for the discouraged, the downhearted, the oppressed and the sinful. When the angel made the annunciation of Christ's birth to the shepherds on Bethlehem's plain he said: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." When Christ was on earth He went about this mission of joy, helping people everywhere. In departing from the earth He lifted up His hands in blessing. In Hebrews 12: 2 we read about "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The greatest incentive, in any work, is to feel ourselves rejoicing in its accomplishment.

Questions. What can be said of the statement of facts? What is the value of the kingdom of heaven? What are the claims of the kingdom? What is the way in which men get ahead; the way they fail? What is the standard test of worth in the kingdom? What can be said about the cost? What about the profit? Suppose Christianity should become universal, what would result? What can be said about personal decision and action for the kingdom? What about the joy?

VII

THE NET CAST INTO THE SEA

Matthew 13: 47–50

THE WAY THE KINGDOM WORKS

The Point of Contact. Jesus always sought to connect His teaching with some event or natural characteristic familiar to His hearers. Always, His parables were concerned with matters under daily observation. The truths He sought to inculcate were never by-products—something acquired only by intricate laboratory work, such as (for example) the hidden values of coal-tar. He never taxed the mentality of His audiences and although His simple stories sometimes contained some "hard sayings," in the main, they were easily comprehended by fisher- and farm-folk of pastoral Palestine. In this fashion and in this parable He likened the kingdom of heaven to a net that was cast into the sea of the world. The process Jesus used to enlighten His hearers was one which they, together with Himself, saw being done daily. The same methods which obtained on the Sea of Galilee during the earthly life of our Lord, obtain, to-day, the wide world over. The centuries have neither brought, nor wrought, any change.

The Net. In each and every movement which has for its honest and specific aim acquired results, men must go out as with a net, and the size of the net will, as a rule, indicate the sort of catch that is expected. No one expects to catch, and no one succeeds in catching many fish with a narrow, poky net. If you go down to the sea you will

find men engaged in using nets which are made of stout cords and able to resist the struggles of large and violently resentful fish. If we enquire as to what sort of net the kingdom of heaven is likened here, the answer will be, a draw- or hauling-net, as distinguished from a casting net. This was a contrivance of immense length which suffered nothing to escape from it. In Cornwall, where the draw-net ("sean") is well known, it is sometimes half a mile long. Leaded below that it might sweep the bottom of the sea, and supported with corks above, it is carried out so as to enclose a large tract of sea; the ends are then brought together, and with all it contains, is drawn upon the shore. The inclusion of this all-embracing feature in the parable is no accidental or unimportant feature. It is brought in purposely and makes the parable typical and prophetic of the world-wide reach and effectual operation of the Gospel.

The net of the kingdom, then, was not made to catch one or two or even a dozen fish, but an exceedingly great number. When the Constitution of the United States was written, those who compiled it were men of vision. Its provisions were not drawn so as to apply only to the relatively small number of men and women then forming the population of the thirteen original States, but for the great multitude that, in later days, would come to be encompassed by it. It was made large and comprehensive, not by accident, but on purpose and by design. Similarly, the net of the kingdom of heaven was, and is, a large one. No one can read the Gospels without realizing how large a thing it is. It was never intended for fishing in small streams and in choice preserves, but to be cast out into the great ocean of life. "Go ye," said Jesus, in His last and great words to His disciples—"Go ye, *unto all the world* and preach the gospel to every creature."

"Cast Into the Sea"—the sea of humanity, the ocean of the world. In due time, Jesus came to earth to publish abroad the principles of the kingdom of God. We have been able, since then, to see how the net is made, and for what purpose it is let down into the deep waters. It was not made for a show, or a sham, or an ornament, or a product of great skill. It was made to *work*—to catch men. It had to be strong to endure the lashing of the waves, and the desperate resistance of some of the stronger denizens of the briny deep. Although visible on the surface, it had to reach down, deep down, until it dredged, so to speak, the floor of the sea. "Higher than the highest heaven, deeper than the deepest sea." No matter how graceful in line and beautiful in shape and carriage a ship may be, the value of a ship, *as a ship,* is conditioned by its ability to carry cargoes. A fishing-net, no matter how finely knotted or excellently devised, is of worth only as it is suited to enfold a great multitude of fish, and to ensure their being drawn safely to boat or shore.

"And Gathered of Every Kind." No one can watch the working of the net. For the most part, at least, it is submerged, and gathering its haul. Of itself, the net cannot choose what sort of fish it gathers. It must take whatever comes within its compass. Occasionally, however, there may be a silvery gleam in the water, that gives assurance of large and fine fish. But the work of a draw-net is, if a metaphor taken from another sphere of activity be permissible, "a bow drawn at a venture."

The fact of its all-inclusiveness is the first thing that strikes one looking at a net drawn ashore. It contains a great mass of dead and living, rubbish and valuable spoil. Mingled with the fresh and wholesome fish, are shells, weeds, mud, and useless refuse of all kinds. And this is set before us by the Master, as the picture of the

Church of Christ, as it now is. Unquestionably, this is what our Lord knew would come to pass—that, while the kingdom net would contain those whom God would gather to Him with great delight as being of His own Spirit, there would be drawn to it, also, those who, in the end, must of necessity be thrown aside and "cast as rubbish to the void."

The Kingdom of God Must Be Proclaimed Everywhere, and the Gospel *preached* everywhere. It is nowhere specified in Holy Scripture that only a certain type of man is desired to accept and partake of its joys and benefits. On the contrary, it is declared to be universal in its scope and purpose. The doors of the churches are open, and if he be loyal to his mission, a Christian minister cannot discriminate and departmentalize. He must offer a welcome to all. "Whosoever" was his Master's word, and no servant is greater than his Lord. If men come professing to believe and proceed to emphasize their profession by applying to enter into Christian fellowship, what can a minister of Christ do but receive them? Recruiting officers, busied with the task of augmenting the defensive forces of the nation, observe precaution, represented by a close physical and medical examination, against unfit and useless applicants. But the gates of the kingdom are open to all; many are attracted to it who never really belong to it, who remain at heart alien and disloyal.

In, and yet out. It is of the utmost importance that we have this thought, which the parable engenders, etched upon our hearts and consciences. We have need to regard it as a settled principle among us, that outward church membership is not sufficient. It is possible to be in the net of the kingdom, and yet be outside of Christ. The waters of baptism are poured on great numbers, both by sprinkling and immersion, who are never washed in the

water of life. The bread and wine are partaken of by thousands at the Lord's table, who never feed on Christ by faith. We are joined together in the Church universal, and in it are men of every kind and of every land. The parable rings true in this, as in every other particular. The net gathers of every kind. But the great, searching question for all who are of Christ's Church, and who call upon Him as Lord is this: "Are we among the good fish?" And it is one, moreover, which *must* be answered, at the last.

"When the Net Was Full." Who shall say when the net is full? Certainly *we* cannot, for we do not know. But (as is pointed out in the Gospels) that time will assuredly come, in its own fit day and order, and it will be a day that will witness the gathering up of all things to completion; a day, in the which, men will understand clearly what, at present, it is difficult, if not impossible to discern,—that all along the ages God's purpose was silently being accomplished and His final standards of value irrevocably set. Fishing with a draw-net is one of the most deliberate operations imaginable, and the fishermen engaged in it often appear to a spectator to be almost tantalizingly slow in making their haul. But they know what they are about, and continue to apply to their calling methods which experience has endorsed.

The "*fullness of time*" for winding up the present state of affairs may appear to us to be provokingly slow in arriving. Why should the evil remain mingled with the good? Why should this admixture be permitted to continue? Why should this, or that, or the other man, or woman, who, quite obviously, is working ill and not good in the Church of Christ, be longer tolerated? Why is a general clearance not decided upon—a day of renovation, something after the manner of a civic Clean-Up Week? Thus do we chafe under the tardy working-out of

the appointed law of the kingdom, failing, as we do so, to realize the import of a phrase quite often upon our lips—"In God's good time."

But One Day the Net will be Drawn to the Shore. "Which when it [the net] was full, they [the angels of God] drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away." The deliberate character of this sorting is plainly intimated. The inspectors *sat down* to their task. "So shall it be in the end of the world." There will be no hasty work, confusedly and awkwardly huddled over. There will be no snap or catch judgments. There will be no "getting by." The standard of quality is set; there will be no allowances made for damaged stuff; no shop-worn merchandise will be allowed to remain in the stock. There is a famous English pottery firm which permits nothing, bearing its name and trade-mark, that is of inferior quality, to be placed on the markets of the world. If, during the process of firing in the kiln, the colour on an article "run," or the clay of which it is made be warped, that article is promptly broken up into shard. Other houses send out stuff of this sort as "seconds." But this one firm recognizes and carries but *one grade*. "So shall it be in the end of the world." "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Plainly, this is the only criterion. By no other will men be judged, as they issue from this life. Only by what we are, can we be finally judged; not by what we believe, but by what that on which we have believed has made of us, in the end.

"And Gathered the Good Into Vessels." The determining factor in this hour of final appraisal will be our fitness (or otherwise) for carrying out God's purposes, "in the ages to come," by carrying forward His work, and finding our joy in that great future over which Christ's spirit is to have undisputed sway. To put it into

a sentence, the entire character of *our* future will be determined by our attitude for it. Serviceableness is that which constitutes goodness in the parabolic sense—which makes us "good" or "bad"—to be gathered into baskets, or to be cast away. Or, seeing that God does not desire service in which there is no idea of fellowship, but rather the intelligent and delighted co-operation of sons, it is *sonship* which determines our destiny. And who but Christ enables us to see, and to know, what sonship in the Father really is, as we enter into it, with Him as our Elder Brother?

Jesus' Final Word of Explanation. The Master did not minimize the dread importance of the fact and certainty of a final judgment, and of a definite separation. Doubtless, He earned the resentment of a certain proportion of His hearers by the plain, unmistakable words which He employed in His final summation of His parabolic teaching. In like manner, do many people resent words of warning, and regard with continuing dislike, those who raise their voice in giving them utterance. Why is it, one wonders, that men and women who would heed, and be truly thankful for any warning which enabled them to escape physical danger, resent so bitterly a word spoken with a view to head them off from moral peril or even destruction? One tenders it only at the risk of forfeiting their friendship, and raising their ire. But just as Jesus shrank not from the momentous words with which He applied His teaching, so must His servants hesitate not to declare the full burden of their message. And that message includes an emphatic declaration of the certainty of a day of judgment, and of its findings being in entire accord with the workings of natural and spiritual law.

There Will Come a Time when, whatever we are, that we shall forever be; when we shall be, as it were,

helpless in the grip of our destiny; when we shall find that the time for choosing is past, and that we must accept and abide by the consequences of our past choices; when, for us, the unalterable and irrevocable word will have been spoken: "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

Well might Chrysostom describe this as "a terrible parable," and Gregory one, "the lessons of which were greatly to be feared." It is indeed charged with lessons bearing on fateful, all important issues. It teaches definitely that an entire separation of good and evil will, one day and by the ordinance of God, straightway come to pass. Looking forward to which, each of us should give diligence, so to use the privileges and means of grace which this Gospel dispensation affords him, that he may be acknowledged of the Lord in that day, when He shall separate, forever, the precious from the valueless, the godly from the vile.

Questions. What was Jesus' method when engaged in parabolic teaching? What is the chief symbol in this parable? What specifically distinguished a draw-net from other nets used by fishermen? How does the net of the kingdom compare with it? What was the result of the casting of the net, and what the character of the "catch"? Are good and evil caught in the net of the kingdom, and if so, can this be avoided? What, then, becomes the paramount question, for all of us? What are we to understand by the term, "when the net was full"? Are we conversant with the hour of this happening? What will then occur? What did Jesus emphatically teach concerning the fate of the good and the bad? What do His closing words, and the parable as a whole, behoove us always to remember?

VIII

THE MERCIFUL KING AND THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Matthew 18: 23–35

THE QUESTION OF FORGIVENESS

Wherever Men Are Gathered Together, on This Planet, there misunderstandings are bound to arise. There is nothing abnormal about the fact, and none can prevent its being continually emphasized. Nor is it in externals that trouble begins. These are secondary and resultant. The cause lies deeper—nearer to the heart. Men differ in temperament; they fail to see eye to eye; they are unable to look at things from a common angle. There is nothing, we repeat, aberrant or divergent about such a state of affairs; on the contrary, it is absurd to expect nature, who in her every other aspect, refuses absolutely to duplicate herself with stencil-like monotony, to do so in this specific regard. No two human beings are exactly alike in any minute particular, and their infinite diversity includes that of difference of opinion.

This natural bent is fostered and strengthened by dissimilar training and differing forms of education; so that, with the very best intentions in the world, men differ in a thousand ways. This, in turn, leads to antagonism and trespass, the perpetration of wrong, the invasion of another's rights. To this state of affairs must be added that resultant on the mischief wrought by a certain type of individual who, out of a spirit of sheer "cussedness," opposes his fellows, attempts a frustration of their plans, and strives to put them "down and out." On every

side, on every day, in this world of ours, there is ample and urgent need for the exercise of the twin-virtue of tolerance and understanding, which is the first step in the direction of that still finer virtue—true forgiveness.

The Parable We are Now to Consider, was uttered by Jesus in answer to Simon Peter's question: "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" Of course Peter knew the Jewish rule and custom in the matter, and Jesus *knew* that he knew. That rule ran as follows: Pardon a first offense, condone a second, forgive a third, but *punish a fourth.* In His reply, however, Jesus declared that forgiveness should be unlimited: "I say not unto you seven times, but until seventy times seven"—in other words, an untold number of times. With the Jews, seven was the perfect number; when time had continued through seven days it began again: the wheel had turned full circle. Hence the phrase used by the Master—"seventy times seven"—expressed the thought as forcibly as human speech *could* express it,—that forgiveness should have no end. Jesus then proceeded to add the parable which is illustrative of the heinousness of an unforgiving spirit.

Christ States a Specific Case. On the surface, the instance cited by Jesus would appear to be an altogether exceptional case, and, hence, one that fails to furnish a presentation of the workings of the average mind. We are shown the picture of a hard, relentless fellow, a man incapable of pity, and as the Duke of Venice says of Shylock, "one void and empty from any dram of mercy." We like to flatter ourselves that, in the main, human nature is better than that, anyway. Once again, the bare face of things would appear to endorse such a conclusion. But if we go to the trouble of probing the matter, of logically analyzing the facts and reasonably applying the lessons, we shall discover that, in essence, the spirit of

unforgiveness, as displayed in the parable we are considering, is not exceptional but, on the contrary, a quite common one.

The king in the parable, looking over his accounts, discovers that one of his servants, doing business with him in a large way, is in his debt, to an extent correspondingly large. That this man occupied a position of trust, and had unusual opportunities for advancing his lord's interest, is indicated by the fact that his debt amounted to something like two million pounds (five million dollars)! The debtor being sent for and confronted with his debt, admitted it, but was found to be without money wherewith to discharge it. Whereupon the king commanded that the man's estate be sold together with himself, his wife and his children (as the custom was), in lieu of payment. The defaulting servant pleaded earnestly for mercy and, hearkening to the plea, the king, out of the goodness of his heart, "loosed him, and forgave him the debt."

Doubtless the debtor was overjoyed at the good fortune, which his release from financial obligation and physical bonds represented. But that seems to be as far as he went. There is nothing recorded which suggests that he realized, or appreciated the magnanimity of the king. From what we subsequently learn of his character, it is reasonable to conclude that his basic attitude toward the matter was, that the merciful monarch had had due regard to the force of adverse commercial conditions and the worthiness of his servant; that, in forgiving the debt, the king had done what, in the circumstances, was just about the right thing. He had had a scare, of course, but that was over, and carried with it, no mortgage on the future. He remained what he had been, unaffected by his experience, in all likelihood a rascal, but, in any event, cold and hard.

How do we know that? Well, by the record of his subsequent conduct. This forgiven debtor goes out from the presence of his lord, to hunt up one of his associates who owed him a paltry debt of about seventeen dollars. Having just been the recipient of mercy, he might have been expected to exercise the same quality; having recently been forgiven, to have been ready to dispense forgiveness. But the exact contrary proved to be the case. For this man there is no law in the world, now, but one compelling hasty action, and calling for harsh and instant exaction of dues. He resorts to physical violence and demands his money. He will have it at any cost or impose the contingent penalty. He ignores a plea for time-extension and has his debtor thrown into prison. What does this man—himself under tribute to the dictates of mercy—care for petitions such as had filled his own mouth shortly before? Not a snap of his finger! He will have what is his, come what may, or know the reason why!

The story concludes with an account of how other of the king's servants inform their master of the uncharitable conduct of their associate. Whereupon "his lord was wroth" with the man to whom he had forgiven a debt of five million dollars. He rescinds his forgiveness and straightway orders the incarceration of the ungenerous servant, pending the discharge of the debt, which in view of the magnitude thereof, was tantamount to life-imprisonment. "So likewise," says Jesus, "shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses."

Why Do Men Harbour the Unforgiving Spirit?

I. *Selfishness*—Care for oneself alone. All about us we see men to whom God has given talents and riches. Possibly, the thought of these things being a matter of stewardship,—of being held in trust—never crosses their

minds. The debtor in the parable became so accustomed to thinking of himself, to regarding his own interest, that he forgot, or refused to consider, his obligation to his king. It has been said, and with a great deal of warrant, that men always come to hate those they have injured; and it is reasonable to suppose that this debtor, knowing the sum he owed to be of such magnitude, and the possibility of his discharging it so remote that virtually the debt had become a theft, hated his lord with a slow, resenting hatred. As we have already intimated, he felt no genuine thankfulness for his release, and no disposition to exercise or dispense mercy to his fellows. This type of man harbours the unforgiving spirit almost entirely because he cannot, for the life of him, entertain anything worthier. By a slow, insidious process, every good, worthy or generous impulse dies within him. He forgives no one. It is his boast that he gives no quarter and expects none—which is never more than a half-truth—and proceeds to prosecute his goings to and fro in the world, until one fine day, he is caught in a jam, and promptly proves himself the loudest squealer of them all.

II. *Fear.* In almost uncounted instances men would forgive those who have become the potential recipients of their forgiveness, were it not that they are afraid of being thought chicken-hearted, weak-kneed, or squeamish. This attitude is fostered by an undue regard for the dictates of public opinion, just as it promoted the old duelling-spirit, and the disregard for the value of human life which obtained in Western pioneer days. "How much can I forgive, without being thought cowardly?" is a question which countless men have asked themselves, when the angels of their better nature have counselled forgiveness; and having thus temporized with the higher impulse have hearkened to the lower, and ended by for-

giving nothing at all. But whether it be pride, or bluster, or cowardice, or slumbering resentment, or deep-seated hatred, which are the springs of an unforgiving spirit, matters not at all. From whatever cause arising, it is utterly wrong and stands eternally condemned in the mouth and words of the Master: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you. . . ."

The Remedy. The cure for the many ills which arise out of the exercise of an unforgiving spirit, hardness of heart and enmity, is not to be found in drastic laws, but in redoubling our efforts to have the principles of the kingdom of God receive a wider acceptance, and the Spirit of Christ Jesus a more effectual lodgment in the lives of men and women, the wide world over. The evil to be combatted is a matter of the heart; the cure must be made to apply in the same area. Men's hearts are filled with evil thoughts, and as a direct, inevitable consequence, their lives are filled with evil deeds. And among these, none works more havoc than that which arises from the lack of a forgiving spirit.

We, as Christian Men and Women, Are On Trial Here. Can we, at any time, ask God for forgiveness and assurance of His favour, while we have, as it were, our hand on the throat of our brother, demanding requital to the uttermost farthing? To such a question, there can be but one answer, and that in the sternest negative. Furthermore: every bitter word we speak, every unkind or ruthless act we do, every exacting thought we harbour, affects and raises a question as to the spurious or genuine character of our Christian profession.

None can deny that Jesus declared unlimited forgiveness to be the paramount law of His kingdom, and declared its continuance to be contingent upon the inward disposition of each member of it to condone offences, and to live on terms of goodwill and loving kindness with every

other member. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses," says Jesus, "neither will your heavenly Father forgive *your* trespasses." It is only, perhaps, when a man definitely realizes that there *are* trespasses against God which require to be forgiven, that he realizes the indispensability of forgiveness in his own contacts with mankind. There are those who declare, these days, a sense of sin and the need of Divine forgiveness, to be a synthetic, even fictitious feeling; were this the place, however, one might turn aside and demonstrate, with little or no difficulty, that, far from being spurious and unnecessary, this feeling increases in intensity as a man's soundness of mind and clearness of mental vision acquire an added poignancy and clarity. Our debt to God is great beyond computation, seeing that from His hands we have received blessings, tokens of His favour, deep as life itself. In proportion to the debt, moreover, will be the sense of obligation; and the surest way to become possessed of a forgiving spirit toward those of our fellows who have offended us, is, definitely and continuingly, to have a realization of our debt and obligation to God, and of the need there is that His longsuffering and forgiveness to us-ward, should continue, richly and fully, to be vouchsafed.

To Practice Forgiveness, however, is no easily acquired and as easily accomplished process. On the contrary it is a most difficult thing to do. In this respect, however, it differs not at all from other of the laws which Jesus laid down for the governance of His kingdom, and for the observance by those who would be numbered among His followers and His friends. The Christian profession, as Jesus demands it should be followed, the Christian life as the Master requires it to be lived, has nothing of the armchair and hearth-rug element in it, least of all in that phase of it which connotes

forgiveness, by any of the four following methods of procedure:

1. *Superiority.* When the human spirit is fortified by Divine grace, it is humanly possible to soar clean above the offense and the injury—to reach a clearer air—to attain an altitude from which we *can actually look down* on both, with placidity and a sense of valid and justifiable superiority. Have you noticed how, in these days, the *downward* look has come into its own? That has been brought about by the progress made in aviation, and the facility with which moving pictures can be made from airplanes. In a measure never attained before, we have come to know how islands, and seas, and forests, and rivers, and cities, appear from the upper air. The downward look! Similarly in the sphere of morals and Christian graces, we can, if we so desire, rise superior to attack and injury, and from that point of vantage, and without calling into play a single gesture of lordly condescension, practise the grace of sweet forgiveness.

2. *Oblivion.* It is no unusual thing to hear a man say: "I will forget, but I cannot forgive" or another to exclaim, "I will forgive, but I cannot forget." The teaching of Jesus is to the effect that it is possible to do both. Moreover, man's loftiest conception of Jehovah, prior to the dawn of the Gospel dispensation, portrayed Him as a Deity who forgot and forgave, who forgave and forgot. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins. . . . For they shall know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Of course it can be urged that what is possible to God is not susceptible of attainment by mere mortals; that human limitation prevents any of us exercising qualities which are the attributes of Deity. But the fact is,—and

although it might seem that there are injuries which no man can be expected to forgive or forget—we may, in our relations with God, be lifted up to splendid heights, unique in kind and of surpassing sacredness; we may be so imbued with the Spirit of the Highest as to be able to emulate the God-like quality of *forgetful forgiveness,* and to say of our wrongs and our injuries: "I will remember them no more."

3. *Excusing the offender.* It is possible for a man to have his whole life darkened, and altered, and obstructed by someone, for whose conduct the injured man himself was primarily responsible. Nor is it beyond the range of reasonable possibility for a man to be found admitting that there was something to be said for the attitude his traducer, or enemy, had adopted; to confess to there having been considerable provocation: that were positions reversed, and conditions remained unchanged, he would have acted precisely as his injurer had acted. As a matter of plain fact all of us could, were we sufficiently disposed to do so, find some valid reason, some tenable ground, on which to proceed toward the fostering of a kindly spirit and the exercise of ultimate forgiveness. "Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done unto thee, *so* shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest."

4. *Faith in God to take care of the offender.* God is merciful, but God is just. It is written in Holy Scripture that a man's sin is sure to find him out. This must not be construed to mean the policeman, or the sheriff, or any other part or process of earthly law. It is a man's *sin* that finds him out. And the great and unerring Judge will see to it, that wrong-doing is squarely and adequately dealt with. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." This "vengeance" may be as the poles asunder from any human conception of it. But justice will be done, the rights of the case vindicated, according to the

rulings of One who is too wise to err. "And though justice be our plea," as Shakespeare puts it in the words of Portia, "it is ours to consider, that in the course of justice [if untempered by mercy] none of us should see salvation."

The Fate of the Unmerciful Servant suggests, in the plainest sort of way, that the mere cancellation of our moral and spiritual debt does not, of itself, connote or imply moral and spiritual salvation. It points out, too, that unless God's forgiveness humble us, and beget within us a truly meek and loving spirit, we cannot be owned as His children. The best assurance that we ourselves are forgiven, is the consciousness that this self-same spirit of the forgiving Lord is working in our own hearts, and causing to spring forth in our daily life and relation with our fellows, the flower and fruit of true forgiveness.

Questions. What are the root causes of mutual misunderstandings? What were the circumstances leading up to this parable? What was the Jewish law, or custom, concerning forgiveness? With what familiar phrase did Jesus write "finis" across it? Was the instance, which Jesus cites in this parable, of a usual or an exceptional sort? What course did the king proceed to follow? How did his magnanimous attitude react on the debtor? How do we know? What followed his reprehensible showing? What is the concluding phase of the story? Why are men so unforgiving? What are the underlying causes? What is the remedy? Who are on trial here? Four aspects of forgiveness are touched on, in our study: what are they? What lesson does the fate of the unmerciful convey?

IX

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

Matthew 20: 1–16

THE INEQUALITIES OF LIFE

Here is a Story Designed by Jesus to teach the great disparity which exists between labour undertaken and performed in a huckstering vein, and work commenced and carried to completion in a spirit of co-operation and confidence. This the Master supplements with examination of the difference in the character of the reward given to work which, in quantity, may be imposing, but in motive, mean and niggardly, and that given to work so small in quantity as to appear insignificant, almost meagre, but which in motive is above reproach.

The Bargaining Spirit. As in all His teaching, the Master here lays stress on motive, purpose, design. He begins by instancing a certain number of men who entered into a bargain with the keeper of a vineyard, to labour for him at so much a day. The negotiations appear to have been happily concluded; everything seems to have been straight and aboveboard. As the day wore along, the husbandman engaged other help, even down to the eleventh hour. At the close of the day, those who had gone out to work early in the morning and under agreement, discovered that their payment was neither more nor less than that received by the men who had come in later, and under no agreement at all. "They murmured," therefore, "against the goodman of the house."

Here is the Portrayal of a Common Human Experience. Men enter into a contract, they under-

take the performance of certain duties, and embark upon their task with a feeling that they have concluded a satisfactory bargain. This bargain may have been made with themselves, with their fellows, with their circumstances or, it may be, with their God. But the bargain turns out to be less satisfactory than was anticipated. In actuality, of course, it remains precisely what it was when entered upon. There had been no coercion and no misrepresentation. "So much, for so much"—so ran the terms, which were lived up to and promptly met. The qualifying circumstances were contiguous and not intrinsic. The fly in the ointment of the bargain consisted in a discovery of the fact that a smarter deal, a more lucrative bargain had been made by others operating in the same field. Had it not been brought into comparison with these later transactions, the original bargain would have continued to look like a just and equitable transaction. But suddenly it takes on another aspect and has the look of a piece of sharp practice on somebody's part, if not a positive injustice. The bargainers are, first, dissatisfied, then disgruntled, and, finally, become determined, if it be at all possible, to shirk or evade a fulfillment of the terms of their contract.

Instances of how the bargaining spirit has been rife in every period of human history, is testified to by numerous and widely separated instances of its working, which obtain in Holy Scripture. Jacob, for example, displayed it in almost every incident of his life of which the Bible has any record. He bargained with his brother Esau; he bargained for his wives; he bargained with the angel at Peniel; he bargained with God. "What shall I do?" asked the rich young ruler, not because it was right and proper to do it, but in order "that I might inherit eternal life." "And what shall *this* man do?" was Peter's enquiry of the Master. "How much better shall I fare than him,

if I undertake this shepherding?" "What is that to thee?" answers Jesus. "Follow thou me."

Within the range of our own observation, the outcropping of the bargaining spirit is easily discerned. It stands diametrically opposed to the spirit of service, and renders futile, non-productive and nugatory much hustling and hurrying to and fro, which, on the surface, appears to be honest and disinterested effort. In the service of the Master, too, it enters with damaging effect. Great gifts, obtrusive zeal, a lifetime of industrious application to a cause or an ideal, make a great impression upon men. But if the industry be calculating, the zeal self-regarding, and the activity unanimated by a devoted spirit, they make no impression on the Master of the workmen. "What shall we receive therefore?" is a question which, if asked of God, nullifies the virtue of much perspiring service. His eye is directed toward another type of worker, who, while regretting the poverty of his service, is perfectly sure that the Master he serves is well worth serving, and who leaves all question of reward to Him. It is thus that, in the activities of God's kingdom, the last is made first, and the first becomes last.

The Inequalities of Life. No other parable which our Lord spake, perhaps, so focusses the mind on this phase of human existence as the one we are now studying. And this is well; for, quite certainly, no other condition of life appears to be so firmly entrenched and unalterable. In one form or another, human inequality is continually being evidenced. Moreover, it is a condition which persists in etching itself upon our social consciousness more sharply and incisively than any other which relates to our lives as we are compelled to live them. It matters very little what the circumstances of a man may be; he may be rich, he may be poor; but, in any event, he will find himself setting up a series of comparisons

between his own lot and that of his neighbour or competitor. As a result of these comparisons, he may consider himself fortunate, and superior, and become elated by the prospect. On the other hand, he may regard himself as being handicapped, or hardly used, or the victim of circumstances, and the gloomy reflection will proceed to cloud the whole of his life's sky.

And yet inequality—diversity of rewards, and so forth—is a universal law. We have all noticed it in nature. There is a curious diversity of the seeds we sow in the spring. There are some that shoot and grow up days before others which were taken from the same packet, sown in the same bed, and that seemed exactly like the rest. It is so with fruit trees in an orchard. Each tree may receive an equal care, and appear to have the same natural advantages; but one will spring out into early fruitfulness, while another holds back, year after year, and only when the husbandman begins to despair of its being, or doing any good, does it commence to bear fruit.

We See It Operative in All Phases of Civic and National Life. *Equal distribution of wealth* is a condition unknown to modern life, and for the most potent of all reasons—economic impossibility. One need not labour the point here. None—not even its most wild and rabid advocate—can demonstrate financial parity to be aught but a luring mirage, a Utopian dream.

Equal distribution of mental gifts, or of equal opportunities for the application of such gifts, nowhere obtains. The teaching of the Parable of the Talents finds endorsement on every hand, and only the fretful and ignoble chafe under the thought. To rail at a man because of his possession of conspicuous mental endowments, effects nothing more than to invite attention to the paucity of our own claims.

Equal distribution of spiritual gifts was never a condi-

tion of the Divine economy. Not *equal* gifts, but gifts in accordance with fitness, capacity, moral worth. God is never mocked, and has so ordained it, that one of the things easiest of encompassment in this world is to distinguish between the real and the spurious saint. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said Jesus, and by their fruits we *do*. As with the gifts, so with the rewards. If this were the rightful place for theological discussion, it would be no difficult task to show that God is debtor to no man; that the rewards of Christian service *being rewards of grace, and not of works,* are regulated by the beneficent will of Him who owes nothing to mankind; that such an arrangement is consistent with the strictest equity. But we leave the matter here, with the thought that God is a rewarder of meritorious service and *not* of make-believe.

"Why Stand Ye Here Idle?" Down to this present hour the procedure of hiring, described in this parable, is observed in Eastern lands. During the whole season when vineyards may be dug, the common workmen can be seen going early to the market-place of the neighbouring village or city, and there stand around, until the husbandmen in search of labour arrive. While waiting to be hired, they take their morning cup of coffee and eat a morsel of bread. The owners of vineyards engage the number of labourers they need, who immediately go to the vineyards and there work, in Oriental fashion, until a little while before the sun sets. It is no uncommon thing, however, for men to stand in the market-place, during the entire day, without finding employment. Others are hired to do a half-day's work, or two or three hours' labour, and even "at the eleventh hour"—an hour before sunset. Sometimes the terms of payment have to be particularly bargained for; but, in the great majority of cases, the matter is left to the generosity of the employer,

who gives whatever *backshish* he feels disposed. According to the liberality or otherwise, which marks their dealings with their hired help, these husbandmen and vineyard owners speedily come to be known as generous employers or hard masters.

Hiring for the Spiritual Vineyard. It has been stated by more commentators than one, that this parable is harder to interpret than any other that the Saviour uttered. It is true that some phases of it appear to run counter to our already accepted ideas of the workings of the kingdom; but the lesson Jesus would here be stressing, appears to be reasonably clear. He is showing us that His love and His desire for labourers to share the toil and the joy of His kingdom, are such as lead Him to accept half a life—even the fag-end of it—rather than it should be left standing outside His vineyard altogether. He would appear to be giving enheartenment to those who are troubled at the thought of having missed the first appearance of the householder at daybreak, and to give them to realize that, at high noon, and even when the evening hours are drawing on, there is still a place to be had in His service. As the old-time preachers used to put it: "It is never too late for God's grace."

The late-comers. It has been assumed, however, that the reason for the acceptance of the late-comers by the lord of the vineyard, together with his reimbursing them on equal terms with early arrivals, is to be found in this fact—that the first hired had worked negligently or, at best, with great deliberation, while the last-hired had gone to work with a will, and had accomplished as much in their part-day as the others did in their full day. There is little if any ground for this assumption in the parable. Indeed such a theory, if accepted, blunts the whole point of the Lord's teaching, and transfers the

entire incident from the sphere of spiritual concerns to the prosaic region of common, elementary sense. It leads us to wonder why Jesus should have thought it worth while to utter a parable for the justifying of so very ordinary a transaction; or, if He did, should have omitted the very thing which constituted the justification. Such an interpretation brings us back to the level, from which, in order to raise us, the parable was spoken, and to affirm that God's rewards are not of grace but of debt—the very untruth which the Master intended it to rebuke and to reprove.

The lesson the Master would have us learn is this—that we should eschew, and utterly avoid the hireling spirit. He is telling us all—early and late-comers alike—that we must labour for Him in faith, and trust, and hope, looking for nothing again, save that, which, in His great bounty, He deems right should be ours. "What is *right*"—not what is "right" according to our own adjudications but what is "right" in *His* sight, whose mercy is over all His works, who doth what He wills with His own, and who hath said to all who enter His service and labour in His vineyard, "Whatsoever is *right* I will give you, for I am thy God, and thine exceeding great reward."

The Application of This Parable to the Jews. The thought of what might have had a primary place in the Master's mind, is by no means to be excluded from this study. There is the wider application, of course, to which we have already given attention, but there is also *this:* One finds here a prophecy and a warning of the causes which would lead to the rejection of the Jews—the first called into the vineyard of the Lord—these causes being, mainly, their proud appreciation of themselves and of their own work; their displeasure at seeing the Gentiles, aliens so long, placed on the same footing and admitted to equal privileges with themselves in the

kingdom of God. All this *was* notably fulfilled in the Jews, and their conduct *did* supply a solemn confirmation of the warning here given.

It must be remembered, however, that the warning of this parable was addressed to the Apostles, as the chiefest and foremost in the Christian Church—the earliest called to labour in the vineyard of the Lord—the *first*—both in point of time and the amount of labour they would have to undergo. The disciples had seen the rich young man go sorrowfully away, unable to abide the proof by which the Master revealed how strong were the bands which held him to the world. Then, through Peter the spokesman of them all, they would fain know what their reward should be. "What shall we have therefore?" The Lord answers them freely and fully in the parable, showing them that the question was not a rightful one; that it put their relation to the Lord on a wrong footing; that there was in it, a tendency to bring their obedience to a calculation to "so much work, so much reward."

This Lesson Taught to Peter and the Rest of the Twelve, is Taught to Us All. We have already touched on the warning reflection that the first may be altogether last. There is need, however, to give it an even fuller emphasis. It behooves us all to remember that if those who seem chiefest in labour permit themselves to forget that the reward is of grace and not of works, they may altogether lose the things they have wrought; and those who seem last may yet, by keeping their humility, stand first in the day of God.

The Final Thought. Rightly pondered, this parable will be found to give no encouragement to late entrance into the Lord's service. All outside His vineyard, is an area of spiritual idleness. To think of His service as one into which we may enter at any time convenient to ourselves, is a grave error. "Why stand ye here, all the day

idle? Go ye into my vineyard, and what is right ye shall receive." Our Lord pointedly invites us to work for Him, to live for Him, and to do so with the assurance that whatsoever is right, He will assuredly bestow. Possessed by the true spirit of His service we may go on, confidently believing that He will give far more than His servants can earn or deserve; that He is never unrighteous, or liable to forget any labour of love which is wrought for Him, nor fail to show Himself the abundant rewarder of all that serve faithfully in His vineyard.

Questions. What cardinal truth is this parable designed to teach? What is understood by "the bargaining spirit," and how does it apply to modern life? What causes the bargainers to become dissatisfied? What instances of discontent and dissatisfaction are cited? What condition, common to daily life, does the parable suggest? Is equality a universal law, or otherwise? How does it work out in the (1) civic, (2) mental, (3) spiritual sphere? What practice, common to the Orient, is dealt with by the Master? How is this exemplified in the vineyard labourers of the kingdom? What untenable theory concerning the equal payment of labourers has been advanced? What is the *real* message of our Lord, in this regard? What is the application of the parable regarding the Jews? What was the lesson taught to Peter, the rest of the twelve, and to us?

X

THE TEN VIRGINS, THE TALENTS, THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Matthew 25: 1–46

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

How Far Are We Responsible for Our Thoughts and Actions? This important question is considered in the parables we are now to study. The narrative, recorded in Matthew 25, ought to be read very carefully. The words were uttered, by Jesus, two days before the feast of the Passover, in the closing week of His earthly ministry (Matt. 26: 1, 2). He leaves no doubt as to His position on the matter of personal responsibility.

The Subject of Man's Accountability, for what he does or does not do, has been a subject for discussion as far back as we can trace his history. It has entered into all philosophies and religions. Scientific men have gone out of their special fields to state their opinions. The whole matter is very much to the fore at the present time, giving food for much earnest thought.

Here are a few of the questions asked: Is man obliged to do, what he does do, by forces within and without him and beyond his control? Can he resist them, if he will? Is man a piece of sensitive machinery put together by an outside, controlling power, and made to go in a certain way, for a definite time? Is he solely subject to fate, with no say of what he shall, or shall not be? Or, is man endowed with large capabilities which he can use, as he wills, for helping or harming himself and others?

The Practical Side of This Matter is very evident. We judge theories, as well as things, by placing them in action. What fruit do they bear? Is it bitter or sweet? The man who believes that he has no freedom of thought or action, or is a fatalist, often makes no excuse for following out the dictates of his lower nature. He responds to "the call of the wild." Why should he do otherwise? Was he not made to go this way? How can he help himself? One of the worst aspects of the case is that he gives no credit whatsoever to the man who resists evil, and stands against it in all its forms. "Is not this good man," he asks, "only obeying the righteous twist of his nature?"

The man who believes that he is personally responsible, in matters of thought and action, is an entirely different person. "He realizes that water will drown ship and sailor like grains of dust. But let one size up this matter rightly and he will learn to swim and to trim his bark and the wave, which would do such damage, will carry him and his bark, like its own foam, a plume and a power." The more thoroughly a man realizes that he is expected to take charge of his own powers and capabilities and really do something with them worth while, the greater success he will make.

Jesus was ever urging men to think and act, for themselves. He wanted men to be victors in the fight. He urged them to stand up and to overcome difficulties and not to lie down, before them, and be trampled upon.

His religion differs from that of Buddha, in that Buddha taught a pessimistic view of life and prescribed as its sole remedy, ascetic self-extinction.

His religion differs from that of Mohammed, in that Mohammed taught the out-and-out doctrine of fatalism. Good and bad are fate. What anyone is, he is, because it is fated.

These Three Parables present different sides of the same subject of personal responsibility. This is where the kingdom enters, for our exceeding benefit, into every-day affairs—into the "life that now is."

The Ten Virgins. In this story, the kingdom is likened to a social affair, a wedding, to which guests are invited. Here is something, very much worth while. Jesus was much at feasts. He knew that here men relaxed and were easier to get at, than in almost any other place. Quite a little of His teaching was couched in simple, familiar table-talk. It was, at the supper table, the night before He was betrayed that He instituted what we call, the Communion Service, now observed all over the world. We like to go to parties where a goodly and genial company of people, we know, will meet us. When we go we like to be suitably attired. If we do not have the proper clothes in which to attend, we are not likely to enjoy ourselves.

Society people are very particular, when they send out invitations, to see that ample provision is made for all their guests. They feel their responsibility. They look after every little detail that everything may go off well. They expect that those who accept and attend the social function, to which they have been bidden, will see to it that they do their part likewise.

The point in this parable is that five virgins, invited to a wedding, took upon themselves no personal responsibility in regard to a suitable provision for it. They thought so little of it that they neglected to secure oil for their lamps. Through the care of their host, they had their invitation in time, and it rested with them to make the proper preparation. But they made none. They failed to get in to the marriage feast, not through any desire of those in charge to shut them out, but because they

could not qualify, through their own negligence, in the most essential manner.

Fine positions are often opened to men and women but they cannot accept because they have neglected to apply themselves in gaining the necessary knowledge and skill. There are those who do not care where they go or what they do in regard to their character. But when some place opens, very desirable for them, their lack of character shuts the door of opportunity. This is a thing which comes about every day. No person can pass on to another person acquired skill or character. This oil cannot be given away; it must be gained through the accepting of personal responsibility for thoughts and actions.

The wise and the foolish virgins are with us still. We find them in all departments of life. The wise ones still look ahead; they get ready for what is sure to come to pass. The foolish are being, every day, shut out of the things they most desire. They complain of the injustice of this. They fail to see that they are at fault in not getting ready for the desirable things which they crave.

In concluding this parable Jesus said: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

The Talents. The kingdom of heaven is likened to a business transaction. This is another way of looking at it, one which reveals new angles. There are many men who can be appealed to only on this side. Their life is passed in stores, factories, offices and on farms. They are forever studying conditions of trade. They seek new markets and stimulate old. They propose to leave nothing to chance. They accept orders that come from afar. They send their own goods far afield. In the matter of personal responsibility they trust others and expect to be trusted. They go away from their home towns and leave

their business to the men under them. They ask for an accounting when they return and they expect to hear of an advance being made.

Note how natural everything here is: "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods." When this man returned, he again called his servants. He expected no man to hide behind another but to stand out as a profitable servant. The kingdom of heaven is advanced when everyone takes a personal interest in it to see that it goes forward. Looked at from one side, the New Testament seems to teach that God has done everything for us. Looked at from another, it seems to teach that we must do all for ourselves. Both are true. We are endowed with powers and capabilities which we must use, in "making good" and producing a profit for our Lord.

The Final Judgment. The kingdom of heaven has its place in everyday matters; the little courtesies and kindnesses, which, when practiced, help so much in making life worth living, in the home, on the street, and in social affairs. Omitted, life is drear indeed. Here is a matter of being judged for the giving, or not giving, of a cup of water to the thirsty, for a visit to a prisoner, providing shelter for a stranger and clothing one who is in need. It is not a question of knowing so much more than another, or of having a better position, or of being great, in any sense of the word, but of kindness of heart and love for one's fellowmen. How near home this matter of judging is brought when we are shown to be personally responsible for the making of a brighter and better world!

The final division and placing hereafter, according to this parable, is made a question of a kind or unkind heart. Here is something which everyone has under per-

sonal control, which makes good or bad actions. The choice is left to the individual and the individual is held responsible.

To those on the right hand—those who have thought good and endeavoured to carry out their kindly intentions—the verdict is given by the King: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

To those on the left hand, the verdict is, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Note that those on the right hand and on the left seemed, in a certain way, to be unconscious of their good or evil deeds. It is a fact that the time comes, when our characters become fixed, so that we act in right and wrong ways without conscious attention. This is the best or worst thing that can happen to any man.

Note, again, that the righteous are called to enter a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world; and the evil minded to a place prepared, not for human beings, but for the devil and his angels.

There Are Certain Things Common to the Three Parables which are well worth bringing out.

First. Ample opportunity and time were given to all. The wise and foolish virgins had an equal chance to get oil for their lamps. The men who made gain of the talents entrusted to them, and the man who hid his lord's money, had the market open to them alike. Those who gained and those who lost the verdict of "Well done," and an entrance into the blessed kingdom, started with the same equipment.

Second. Ample ability was given, in every case, to do the things required. Those least provisioned, had more than enough.

Third. Ample provision was made to compensate, and

more than repay, for the effort exerted. None suffered under the disability of sparse supplies, or short commons.

Fourth. The taking on of personal responsibility was expected. No arbitrary measures were used. The way of responsibility accepted is to make for strength of character. The way of responsibility rejected is to make for weakness of character. And in the great day of final assize, men are consigned to eternal felicity or wretchedness, according to their worthiness or unworthiness of character, which a lifetime on earth has given them. But there is this wonderful comforting thought: the Judge is *just* and will not err.

Questions. How far are we responsible for our thoughts and actions? What are a few of the questions asked? What is the practical side of this matter? What can be said of the teaching of the parable of the ten virgins? What is the point in it? What can be said of the parable of the talents? What is the view point of the parable of the final judgment? What are the four thoughts common to the three parables?

XI

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10: 29–37

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

A Story for All Time. This wonderful apologue, is a story, true in every age and clime. The circumstances in which it is set, the human types it introduces, the conditions it describes, find place in the annals of all sorts and conditions of men. As a narrative (considered quite apart from its moral significance), it will never become stale, never be superseded, never grow old. And this, simply because it is composed of the elements of eternal truth, and, in classic form, epitomizes the whole economy of human conduct. To proceed to discover in it a series of far-fetched allegories, is to deprive oneself of its most valued and valuable benefits, and to trifle with the trend and purpose of Holy Scripture. Its sole objective is to set forth the nature of true neighbourliness and to demonstrate the character and content of authentic brotherly love.

Who Is My Neighbour? The question which led Jesus to utter this great parable as an answer thereto, is always in the forefront of queries agitating the human breast, and always pressing for a reply. It is a question, too, which, by the simple expedient of shifting the emphasis from one word to another, will be seen to present and effect four phases of the general enquiry it embodies. The lawyer who asked it of Jesus, may have been quibbling. In all probability he was doing just *that*. By Jesus' answer to his first question he had been set back in his

place, in quiet, effective fashion. Now, he, in turn would either reduce Christ to silence or lure Him to the utterance of an inconsistent statement. But whatever the lawyer's motive prompting his question, there was not the slightest suspicion of hair-splitting or quibbling about the answer he received. The Master's reply was not only the right reply in the circumstances, but the answer to it, for all time.

Right From the Dawn-Time of the World humanity has been divided by all sorts of barriers—race, language, nationality, preference, prejudice, hatred, enmity, profession, occupation, caste. For their retention men have fought and died. For their elimination, others have striven valiantly, labouring by means of concessions, treaties and agreements of every sort, to come together. For the most part, however, nothing more than failure has attended their efforts. Yet here, in this parable, Christ presents a method which offers an effective solution to the entire problem of human segregation, one that covers the whole ground and fulfills the whole law.

The Road of Life. The parable of the Good Samaritan is the story of the journey all men take, and of the hazards which beset their feet. It is not a long road, even when pursued to its utmost limit, yet potential peril is a condition common to every foot of the way. "A certain man" are the words with which Christ opens this parable. The peculiarity of this word "certain" is, that when used in the sense here implied, it means something almost the reverse of its face-value interpretation. That is to say, it is indefinite; so that, in reading of "a certain man" one means any man, every man, the sharer in a common experience whether it have its setting in far-off Palestine or near-by Philadelphia, whether it be lived in the time of Jesus of Nazareth or our own day. Jerusalem to Jericho! So notorious had the highway connecting these

two cities become—so numerous the hold-ups and murders committed thereon—that it came to be known as "the red and bloody way." To travel it meant (even when reckoning on the most fortunate outcome), that a man was taking chances. At its worst, it meant that somewhere between the two points, the traveller met his end.

The Road of Life is like unto it. Even in business and professional areas, thieves lurk ready to purloin not only gold, but good names which either in man or woman is "the immediate jewel of their souls." These ruthless robbers are out, not only to rob but to kill, if the accomplishment of their evil purposes require so drastic a condition. Every morning newspaper contains the account of some act of violence, some conscienceless depredation, some helpless victim "stripped to his foolish hide," some deed of darkness, done on the Jericho Road. Of course it may be recorded as having happened on the Boston Post Road or on Riverside Drive, in New York City, or Halsted Street, in Chicago. But it is all one. With all our boasted police protection, and despite all the measures adopted in order to assure the safety of the commonwealth, we have not yet succeeded in staying or averting the evils and disasters of the Jericho Road.

"Leaving Him Half Dead." A man sets out on the Jericho Road and falls among thieves who strip him of his clothing, maltreat him and depart "leaving him half dead." In the phraseology of our own day, they do him up pretty thoroughly; and when the thieves have done with him, he is penniless, helpless, well-nigh hopeless. But are such heartless deeds confined to the footpads of ancient Jewry or the dreaded thugs of India? Hardly. Glance through the news of the day, and speedily discover that physical assault, robbery with violence, and utter disregard for the ultimate fate of the victim are still rife. Attacks of another, and more sinister kind, too,

as deadly and as devastating in their effect as crimes requiring the dagger and the bludgeon are still being perpetrated, which indicate, all too surely, that bandits are still operating on the Jericho Road.

A Certain Priest. The first to pass that way after disaster had overtaken the traveller was a man who, of all others, should have stood ready to do the robbers' victim a friendly turn. But he failed utterly to live up to his reputation, made a detour, and "passed by on the other side." Now this man was an official representative of those whose business it was to look out for, and look after, just such cases of need as that from which he deliberately turned aside. He was member of a profession which should never be regarded as being off duty, to which need, in its own inherent helplessness, makes its own appeal. If the wounded man were conscious he must have thought to himself as he watched the priest approach: "Well, here is where I get a little help, anyway." But if he did, he reckoned without his man. The priest, having viewed him from afar—from what is said of him, we may assume that the priest kept himself at a distance—made no attempt to tarry, but "passed by on the other side."

How do matters stand to-day? Well, we have many ministries, many institutions, many public characters, the stated and avowed objective of which is the helping of the disabled, the unfortunate, those to whom life has not been kind, who have felt the "fell clutch of circumstance," who have fallen among thieves. These ministries help—help much. But should one endeavour to procure speedy action—in some instances, any action at all—and, straightway, he is confronted by a lot of red-tape procedure which halts relief, discourages the needy, and adds the supplementary misery of hope deferred. Watch the aged preacher apply for an old-age pension, and note how tedious and lengthy is the interval lying between his ap-

plication and the granting of his just request. Have regard to an old woman who seeks aid and succour from an institution which exists for the very purpose it appears to be so reluctant to exercise, and see her wilt and wither ere the helping hand is outstretched her way. No; all too often, in this our own day, official relief wears, quite ostentatiously, its prescribed uniform, but possesses nothing of the spirit of its office.

The Levite Comes. This man, apparently, was not so flagrantly indifferent to misfortune as the priest. And yet, there is ground of the supposition that, possibly, he cared as little as the priest, but was possessed of a little more curiosity, so "came, and looked on him [the victim] and passed by on the other side." Like the man who had gone on ahead of him, he was pledged to render aid in emergencies of this sort, yet failed, utterly, to honour his pledge. Possibly his strict and legal mind considered the possibility of the wounded traveller's having got into trouble as the result of his own misconduct; again, he may have felt that matters of larger concern awaited him and that he must needs push along; he may have reasoned that danger was abroad, that what had come to this stranger might come to him; or he may have been just a worthless, selfish fellow, despite his calling, one not given to putting himself out for anybody. Be that all as it may, he did nothing to aid the wounded traveller, and like the wearer of the phylacteries, "passed by on the other side." He was, by no means, the last of his breed. Selfishness is still the chief characteristic of the majority of mankind. We have enough to do (we are more than ready to say) to mind our own business without espousing the cause of strangers; and, although, at times, we may go to the extent of voicing sentiments about the virtue of "the side of the road," it will be found, upon examination, that our pronounced preference is for the

other side, that on which the priest and Levite pursued their unconcerned, indifferent way.

Unexpected Aid. But there is yet another traveller to come a-journeying along the Jericho Road. He is a man of alien race, one who is hated fiercely by the Jews, and who, quite naturally, hates them, cordially, in return. All the excuses the others had made to themselves concerning their failure to succour the wounded traveller, could have been his, and many besides. Even the robbers' victim may have looked upon him with aversion and have spurned his proffered aid with cursing or the declaration, "Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil." Finally, he could have excused himself by regarding the Jericho Road as lying in Jewish territory, and that cases of distress should be cared for by the Jews.

But he does nothing of the sort. He sees no Jew lying on the roadside—no national or racial enemy. He sees a man—a fellow-mortal—wounded, stripped of his raiment, half-dead. He asks no questions, but renders help; makes no difficulties, but at once gives aid. He revives the wounded traveller, dresses his wounds, sets him on his (the Samaritan's) own beast, conveys him to an inn, sees that he is well attended, and leaves that which will cover the expense of future care.

The Triumph of Love. All this the Samaritan does at love's behest. Over all supposedly antagonistic influences love comes off conqueror. In other words, love makes a man the neighbour of his fellow. For in the last analysis—the ultimate issue—the true neighbour is the man who has a benign spirit and a friendly heart. When these are lacking, it may be depended upon that when the motive prompting an apparently amicable and sociable action, is properly probed, it will be found to be marred and tinged by self-interest. No external gesture can ever supply the place of love, or atone for its absence.

Love alone can specify who is one's neighbour. Genuine compassion is the deciding factor in making a man brother, neighbour and friend of all.

What Love Can Do. Love does not consider what claim this or the other man has upon his fellow. It seeks to discover what this or that man needs, that his brother man can give him or aid him in securing. Love asks no questions but ever seeks a wider, fuller avenue of expression. "We *know*," says John, "that we have passed from death into life." How? "Because we love the brethren."

What is going to help men to break down the barriers of social prejudice, hatred, meanness and jealousy? Love. What is going to create the "good time" we are always declaring to be coming? Love. What is going to usher in a decent social atmosphere? Love. What is going to help the unfortunate, succour the weak, fortify the timid, save the lost? Love. "The greatest of these is love."

The Only Way. In this parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus Christ put His unerring finger on the sore spot of humanity, and pointed out the remedy—the only and sovereign remedy—that can effect a cure. "Then said Jesus . . . Go thou and do likewise." This command is God's highest law; and not until men regard it and obey it can it be brought to pass, that peace reigneth on the earth and good will in the hearts of men.

Questions. What occasion gave rise to Christ's utterance of this parable? What does it provide? What is its paramount teaching? What name was given to the Jericho Road, and why? What is its present-day significance? What was the condition of the wounded traveller? Why was it incumbent upon the priest to aid him? and the Levite? What supposedly tenable reasons could they have given for withholding assistance? From whom did help finally come? What impulse prompted the Samaritan's action? What is love, in its highest form of expression? What can it be made the great factor in achieving? What is God's highest law?

THE RICH FOOL

XII

Luke 12: 13–21

THE TRAGEDY OF MATERIAL SUCCESS

Worldly Mindedness. In the incident which led to our Lord's utterance of this parable, we are shown a striking example of man's readiness to interject the affairs of this world into the rightful province of the soul. Jesus was talking of the high things of God—of the Holy Spirit's teaching and prompting—when, suddenly, one of His hearers asks Him to assist him in the settlement of his temporal affairs. "Master," he says, "speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." This man is typical of those who are continually planning about the things of time within sound of the verities of eternity. The minister of Christ, to-day, must not expect his congregations to be free of worldliness and inattention, nor his sermons to be more thought of than his Master's. This man who entreats our Lord's intervention in the matter of his earthly inheritance, missed, utterly, the significance of what Jesus was trying to do and to make clear. His thoughts were wholly of himself, and of his own personal gain. He would have Christ help him to a larger patrimony, more money, a finer house, larger holdings. His chief thought—probably, his whole thought—ran upon this present life.

This is the Basis of the Parable. The Rich Fool had no interest, no thought, no concern, outside himself. He did not possess, but was possessed by, great riches. But he was not content; his heart was set on still larger

ownership. He was not an openly bad man. He was just headed wrong, and as a consequence, met with frustration and disaster. He coveted, and he fell. "Beware of covetousness," warned Jesus, "it blinds men." And it blinded the Rich Fool. Moreover: it rendered him incapable of discriminating between mundane and spiritual concerns. He said to the eternal and spiritual part of himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up," when as a matter of fact, his soul hadn't a stick, or a rag, or a stone. The things he had, belonged, wholly, to the material and perishable side of him. His soul was stripped to the bare bone. The point which Jesus proceeded to emphasize was that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth."

The Desire for Material Possessions. This, beyond cavil, is one of the most insistent and generally-held motives of human life. Men, everywhere, act upon it. The careful man, the frugal man, even the spendthrift, although he secures but to squander, give rein to this desire. It gripped the Rich Fool. He had much; his land brought forth abundantly. Yet he was not satisfied. He wanted more. This desire for increased material possessions is a perfectly natural one, and, quite often, leads men to devote all their powers to its furtherance and indulgence. We see men, at this point, going astray, not because of the intrinsic wrongness of the desire, but by reason of their making it the paramount, ruling principle of their lives.

The Wrong Course of Desire. The acquisition of everything for self, and self alone; the effort to acquire possessions at all costs, and without regard to who may suffer in the process; to seek to feed the soul upon what one can get of material things—all this, is to turn what may have been at one time a quite justifiable resolution into a veritable road to ruin. The Rich Fool's desire to

get and retain goods, began and ended with himself. He sought to satisfy his soul with a fare on which no human soul was ever nourished—a fare which, if persisted in, ends only in leanness and decrepitude. He sought to satisfy his soul with material things. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years . . . eat, drink and be merry." He had no thought outside himself; he sensed no obligation either to God or to his fellowman.

We are all acquainted with men of this sort—men who have no generosity, who possess not even the rudimentary idea of a love which operates in any other area but their own. Sometimes, their families are made to feel the pinch of their selfishness, and even when disbursement is compulsory and inevitable it is uniformly made under protest and with grudging, graceless compliance. No appeal for charity ever reaches them or moves them to participation in any proposed measure of amelioration. Even their business associates are brought under tribute to meet the continual pressure for "greater barns." Such characters have marked every age; they are with us, in our own day. A man of this type lives his circumscribed life, and, in the end, goes the way of all flesh. He may be given an ornate and a costly funeral, but everybody puts him in his right place. While his wealth grew, his spirit shrivelled. "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106: 15).

The Right Way of Desire or Satisfaction. There is among us, a large and increasing number of those who desire to accumulate goods and acquire material possessions. They understand the art and practice of getting and conserving the things of this present world, and accomplish that to which they have set their hands. But the difference between these men and those to which reference has just been had, is this: Having acquired their

possessions they administer them in a manner which renders the process a service both to God and to their fellows. They are a constant joy and benefit to those with whom they are brought into contact. While they grow materially, they increase spiritually. These men are to be found in commercial circles, among the learned professions, in all sorts of occupations, in every prosperous walk of life, and furnish concrete evidence of the fact that ample means can be employed to promote and foster a spirit of signal generosity, and to become the outlet for the activities of a large and liberal soul.

The End of the Rich Fool is Tragic. But it is the end of that sort of man, everywhere, and is a common occurrence in the annals of our own time. Men accumulate for themselves only. They are permitted to realize their ideal; sordid as is their goal, they reach it. They become rich sometimes, beyond the dreams of avarice. As old age and the burden of years saddle themselves upon them they discover to their amazement and dismay that the limitations of their slowly crumbling physical resources prohibit their enjoyment of any but the simplest sort of things—commodities, which, for the most part, are within the reach of a man of straitened means and so easy to come by as to render their riches ridiculously superfluous and futile. And yet these men are called clever and prudent and wise. These are the men who are commended and flattered and, quite often, quoted as an example. Jesus, however, declared them to be fools. Then they die. Others enter into possession of that which, with great labour and at tremendous cost—the price of a soul—they have brought together, and, presently, it is scattered to the four winds of heaven. Yes: the character brought to our notice by Jesus in this parable is far from being an uncommon one, and the thought that it is so, is something more than mildly dis-

turbing. The withering exposure our Lord makes of the folly of worldly-mindedness has great need, these days, to be widely heeded. Surely none of us desires to be the kind of man that God calls "fool."

The Exhortation—the Urge—is to be Rich Toward God. This parable is not a tirade against riches, as such; it is a warning against the tendency to permit the desire for their acquisition to dominate the life and drive from the throne of being, other and worthier rulers. The spiritual experience of a rich man is unquestionably difficult and beset with peril. Even when his heart *is* turned toward God, the owner of great possessions carries a great weight, and runs the race to heaven under a tremendous handicap. The ownership of money has a most hardening effect upon the conscience. Not one of us can say with confidence, with impeccable assurance, what we might do if we were to become rich. "Heaven," said one great man on his death-bed, "is a place to which few kings and rich men come." Poverty has many and grievous disadvantages; but riches destroy far more souls than poverty. "The *love* of money is the root of all evil. While some having coveted it, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6: 10).

To be rich toward God! This is the true, the highest wisdom. This is sterling economy, authentic thrift, genuine prudence, positive provision for a time to come. Whether a man have great possessions or not, the necessity is urged upon him, in this parable, to be rich toward God.

Well, when can it be said of a man that he is rich toward God? Never until he is rich in grace, rich in faith, rich in good works. Never until he has applied to Christ, and bought of Him gold tried in the fire. Never until he has a clear title to a house not made with hands,

eternal in the heavens. Such a man is truly rich; his treasure is incorruptible. His bank never suspends payment; his inheritance fadeth not away. Man can deprive him of them. All things are his already—life, death, things present, things to come. Riches of this sort, are within the reach of every man; but our point and province in this study is with the man of means. These eternal riches are within *his* reach, even, and having his eternal concerns safeguarded, he may turn zestfully to his rightful task—that of devoting his means and his influence to the raising of the moral and spiritual standards of the world.

The only man who is really wealthy and wise is the man whose life is governed by the rule and righteousness of Jesus, who being rich yet became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. To live otherwise is to be "not rich toward God." This, be it remembered, finally, is the character of him who gives nothing to God's glory—neither money, affection, thought, time nor interest. There are thousands of this character. They are rich toward everything but God. They have plenty to give to the world, some of them, but nothing to give to God. Ask them to aid a worldly scheme, and they can find money, time and attention. Ask them to do something for God, and they have no money and no time. Those are the truly rich who have property such as will be recognized in the great Day of final assize. Many owners of millions of dollars are literal paupers in the sight of Almighty God. They are rich, neither in grace, nor faith, nor good works. Spiritual bankrupts! What a state—what a fate!

Questions. What quality of mind does the interjection of the question leading up to this parable exhibit? What did the questioner utterly miss in Christ's discourse? Where did the Rich Fool's interest lie? What, chiefly, was wrong with

him? What, precisely, was Jesus' warning? Was the man He addressed *really* rich? What was it Jesus said a man's very life, and not his riches only, must be held to consist? Is the possession of material means an inherent transgression? In what does its evil element assert itself? What is the wrong course of desire toward riches? What is the rightful attitude? Why was the end of the Rich Fool tragic? Has he any successors in our own age? What is the exhortation and urge of this parable? What is meant by being "not rich toward God"? What is being rich toward God? Who is the truly wise and truly rich? In what do their riches consist?

XIII

THE GREAT SUPPER

Luke 14: 1–15; 16–24

JESUS AND SOCIAL LIFE

The Parable of the Great Supper is related in the last-named of the passages cited above. In order properly to understand it, however, the first-named passage should previously be read and carefully considered. This section of Luke's Gospel describes Jesus sitting at meat in the house of a Pharisee. There appears to have been quite a goodly company present. In inviting Jesus to his house, the Pharisee evidently had in mind to observe Him at close quarters, and to hear, at first hand, what He had to say. It is reasonably clear that neither the host nor the invited guests regarded Jesus as being one of themselves. He was on exhibition, for the chronicler records that "they watched Him." None of us cares to be "watched" in a specially assembled company—to be put on probation, as it were, as to what we may do or say. But the Master does not appear to have minded. While the Pharisee and his invited guests were watching *Him,* He was watching *them* and although they were not aware of it, or, at best, but dimly perceived it, He held over them a pronounced advantage. They had perforce to wait until He gave utterance to His thoughts; He, on the other hand, knew what was passing in *their* minds and moving in their hearts.

Jesus Mingled With All Grades in Human Life. He went to feasts held at the houses of publicans and

sinners. He was the guest of Pharisees and scribes. John the Baptizer shunned society. Jesus did otherwise; in a certain sense, He sought it, and moved freely and easily in its circles. He went everywhere. He gave two great feasts Himself—one to five thousand guests, another to four thousand. His first miracle is recorded in the description of a wedding. He instituted the great ordinance that has come to be known to us as the Lord's Supper, but which in its initial setting was simply a gathering around a table—a young man sitting down to break bread with His chosen and particular friends.

But Wherever He Went Jesus Dominated the Company. Many and many a man, attending a social gathering permits it to dominate *him;* he allows himself to become the prey of the passing hour. It may be that the proceedings are of a character, to which in his better moments, he would never lend his presence. He knows them to be distinctly off colour, yet yields them his tacit approval, remains, and—holds his peace. But Jesus never did anything of this sort. He never lowered His ideals nor abandoned His principles, in order to stand, or sit "in well" with any company in which He chanced to be gathered.

Take, for example, the incident of our especial study. The Pharisee, whose guest Jesus was, held it to be unlawful to heal on the Sabbath Day. But Jesus straightway healed a man of dropsy, and justified His action! One of the common evils in the social life of Jesus' day was the struggle for precedence—to have interest and attention centered in, and on oneself—and making entirely secondary any thought of entering into the proper enjoyment of social intercourse. Hence the Master's reference to the rivalry for the chief seats. Another common feature of the society functions of these times was that, for the most part, they were arranged for people so

surfeited by celebrations of the kind, as to render them quite indifferent to the ample fare provided. Jesus suggested the widening of the gates of hospitality, so as to admit those to whom the good things of this life came but seldom, and even to those who stood in definite physical need.

The table-talk at the Pharisee's board was becoming rather pointed and personal, when one of the company (like his host, a Pharisee) remarked unctuously: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Quite evidently the man had it in mind to ease off the conversation, or to turn it into another channel. Jesus, knowing the remark to be insincere, and also being aware of the Pharisees' wonted indulgence in pious phrases which sounded well but meant nothing, launched out, instantly, into the Parable of the Great Supper.

The Kingdom of God is Represented, Therein as Being a Great Feast—as something joyful and greatly to be desired, yet not regarded as a primal or vital occasion. Guests were bidden and, quite evidently, accepted the invitation. But as the date set for the celebration drew near, the invited guests "with one consent began to make excuse." Their conduct was eminently anticipatory of our own day. Everybody praises goodness, as being unquestionably desirous but—for somebody else! "Brown, Jones, and Robinson should accept, but as for me—well, not just now. My circumstances have to be taken into account; my temperament must be given room for exercise and display. Acceptance connotes the taking of the proper course—the treading of the right path—perhaps, but—well, I cannot undertake to tie myself down. An excellent thing for some folks, I know. But for me—not yet. I may drop in later—after a while." Human nature does not change. Now, as ever, it is prone to give up worthy things for trivial, great

things for small. It makes inconsequent, even childish excuses for non-compliance. It fritters life away.

As we have just stated, the bidden guests refused, and just before the hour of assembly the refusals and excuses began to pour in. So far as the originally invited company was concerned, invitation and supper were alike wasted. In the examples cited, the excuses were trivial and, as reasons for non-attendance, absurd. Yet it is just at this point—in the very character of the excuses tendered—that the central truth which Jesus sought to inculcate is to be sought and found. Few truths are more generally, perhaps so completely overlooked, as the pivotal truth in the parable of the Great Supper. The chief fact to be borne in mind is this: the various concerns which the invited guests alleged required their attention and prevented their being present at the feast were, *in themselves, legitimate, even praiseworthy activities.* It is not so much an utter disregard and open breach of God's law which ruin men's souls and keep them from the Gospel feast, as it is an excessive attention bestowed upon laudable and lawful things.

The Excuses. We turn, here, to a brief consideration of the grounds on which the invited guests excused themselves from the Great Supper, as being typical of the various reasons offered by men who desire to excuse themselves from closing with the offers of Christ's Gospel. They may be said to have some slight individual characteristics, but we are not impressed by them. As reasons for non-attendance at the banquet, they have one common quality—absurdity. Not one of the excuses had any real or valid foundation. Plainly, the thought was this: These men did not desire to go to the supper, and the excuses they offered were a sort of compromise between an acceptance and a blank refusal. There is an old Oriental tale which runs as follows: A man sought out a neighbour,

from whom he desired the loan of a rope. "I'm sorry," said the latter, "to have to refuse you. But the fact is I am using the rope myself to tie up a heap of sand." "That's sheer nonsense," replied the first man. "You can't tie up sand with a rope!" "Oh yes, I can," was the repelling rejoinder. "One can do practically *anything* with a rope he doesn't desire to lend."

I. *The Piece of Ground.* "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it." Of course, the man had seen this land *before* he bought it. "Buying a pig in a poke" is a proverbial axiom which seldom finds translation into business terms or bargains. This bidden guest sets up the imperative character of his investments, as an opposing necessity and does it, one supposes, with a certain show of courtesy. Necessity compels him to look after his property, he regretfully suggests. Yet the fellow is plainly bluffing, and his land survey is no reason or excuse at all.

But when we come to apply this thought to spiritual concerns, it takes on meaning which the circumstances of the man in the parable scarcely permit. "I have bought a piece of ground"—if we stop the sentence right there, we have set precisely before us, the reason why men refuse to attend the Gospel feast. "I have bought a piece of ground." In this condition of life, a man is apt to resent anything which reminds him of the fact that there are claims more pressing than even his recent investment. "One day," says Dr. Thain Davidson, "I said to a responsible and highly respected business man, 'When are you going to begin thinking of eternal concerns and of your own spiritual destiny?' 'I cannot tell you,' was his reply. 'Of course, I know that I ought to begin now; I ought to have begun long ago. But it is simply no use; the large probabilities are, that I shall *never* begin. My mind is so crammed with business details, that there is

literally no room for anything else. By virtue and direction of my own choice and act, I have lost all interest in, and relish for spiritual things.'" "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused."

II. *The Yoke of Oxen.* "I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to prove them." Here we come upon a more final, peremptory note of excuse. The man simply announces his intention, assuming there to be no doubt as to its validity and propriety. There is no word of explanation; he does not (as in the instance of the first man) hint at necessity. He simply *goes* and is so absorbed in his errand that he fails to perceive any claim which the host or his invitation has upon him.

Of how many is this true at this hour! Men so busy with the pursuits of this world as to be positively unaware of God's claim upon them or their time; so busy pushing on with mercantile, or scientific, or political affairs, that the bare thought of there being any other objective for the sake of which these affairs should be suspended, finds no place in their thinking, no lodgment in their breast. The things for which they labour are so definite and paramount, that they fail to realize that an entire devotion to them, demands some justification. Had the man in the parable treated his host with proper respect and have placed friendship before self-interest, he would have had just as good, probably a much better frame of mind in which to manage his newly acquired kine. And any man can make a better use of physical and temporal possession and powers if he, himself, be inspired by purposes and aims which spring from fellowship with God.

III. *The New Wife.* "I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come." Before any sort of reasonableness could be claimed for this excuse, we have first to assume that the banquet, to which the man who made it

was bidden, was a "stag party." There is no ground for such an assumption, however, and the glaring insufficiency of the paltry excuse is seen to be the greater harshness with which the invitation is tersely, almost rudely declined. No marital union, which is rightfully undertaken and righteously continued, will ever keep either a man or a woman away from God, or from communion with His saints. Whenever it is presented as an excuse for standing aloof from the banqueting-house of the Lord, it serves only as a thin, easily penetrated disguise for a deep-seated and positive indifference to the invitation of the Host of the soul—"Come; for all things are now ready."

The Last-Minute Guests. Thus did the gracious invitation go unheeded. The supper was ready, and those for whom it was primarily prepared sent their excuse. They were never given another opportunity, however; they were let go. Many expositors and commentators consider this as having specific reference to the Jews, and we are something more than passively inclined to agree. In this day, the Hebrew race complains that Christians do wrong in teaching that their ancestors crucified Jesus, after having refused the invitation to sit at His table. They declare that this teaching should be eliminated from Christian thought and doctrine. But how can history be falsified, and why should it be garbled? What good would result? We may feel sorry for, even sympathetic with, the Jews, yet we *know* that they rejected the Great Invitation. We accept their prophets; we honour and observe their commandments; we teach (in part, at least) their doctrine. Why do not they, in return, accept the greatest representative of their race? This refusal constitutes one of the amazing puzzles of history; for Jesus has made good in all He said—in all He promised and declared Himself as undertaking and being able to accomplish, in every way and on every day.

They have chosen otherwise, and are passed by. Paul seeing their doom accomplished declared, "Through their fall, salvation is come to the Gentiles."

This attitude of refusal is not confined to the Hebrew race. It is a prevalent condition—one demonstrable on every hand. All about us are those who are richly qualified by nature to enter the service of our Master, upon whom graces and privileges appear to have been richly bestowed. We see them pathetically pass up the invitation, think lightly of the gifts, fritter or barter away the privileges and remain, by their own free will and act, "strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and the covenant of promise." Every man of us can call to mind some acquaintance who appears to be almost literally born to be a follower of Jesus. But alas, although not far from the Kingdom, there are still—outside!

But Guests Are to be Summoned—the Banqueting-Hall Must be Filled. "Bring in hither the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind. . . . Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." Here was anticipated the Great Communion of the Apostles of Jesus Christ: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Once, there was a merchant who had a large and flourishing business. He desired to pass it on to his sons. But they refused his offer. When he died, he left them just a few thousands, but to his employees his many millions.

The invitation to the Great Supper, despised by those to whom it was originally addressed, was passed on to those who, least of all, could anticipate any such gracious bidding. These are recognizable in all ages, in all climes. They are those who, assumedly, are beyond help and beyond hope—the maimed, the vagabond, the destitute, the outcast, the criminal—are bidden to the richly-laden

table of the Lord. The invitation is given to the wanderers on the highways and among the hedges of the world; and from the ranks of the nomads the house is filled.

"Come sinners to the Gospel feast,
Let every soul be Jesus' guest;
Ye need not one be left behind,
For God hath bidden all mankind.

"Sent by my Lord on you I call,
The invitation is to all;
Come all the world! come, sinner, thou!
All things in Christ are ready now."

Plainly, the Message Here, is This: Whoever finds himself in a parlous, outcast condition is bidden of God to His table. He, who under mere human scrutiny, fails to reveal a redeeming trait; he who is bowed beneath a load; he who has been maimed in life's mad rush, and who lies inert and helpless along the wayside of life; he who is footsore, and weary, and heartbroken, and clean forespent; he who is hungry, outcast and unclean—to him God's gracious invitation comes. "And compel them to come in." No shame, no sense of heinous sin or utter unworthiness, no thought of ingratitude shown toward a merciful benefactor is to prove a deterrent force. In the parable, the servants of the host were to lay hands on the unwilling; like the members of the Royal Northwest Mounted, they were to "bring in their man." In like manner, the servants of the Great Host are enjoined to represent their Master's cordiality, and by every form of persuasion, entreaty and (if necessary) sanctified force, bring the outcast and the wanderer from the country lanes and the city streets, into the banqueting-house of their Master, whose bountiful provision is "enough for each, enough for all, enough for evermore."

Questions. Under whose roof was Jesus a guest, when He spake this parable? What circumstances led up to its being uttered? What was Christ's general attitude to those about Him? Was He aloof or friendly, reserved or genial, friendly or austere? To what is the kingdom of God likened in the parable? What reception did the Great Invitation have at the hands of those bidden to the feast? What is the crux of Christ's teaching in the matter of the excuses for non-attendance? Why were these same excuses banal and frivolous? What are the chief absurdities of those offered in regard to (1) the piece of ground, (2) the yoke of oxen, (3) the new wife? What effect had their refusals upon the defaulting guests? To whom are those who refused the invitation, primarily, to be likened? What has the refusal meant to them during the passing of the centuries? What other exemplification has this attitude, in our own day? What decision did the donor of the feast come to, when his original guests stayed away? What were his orders to his servants? Give the wider application of this command, and name those to whom it was entrusted. What is the "highways and hedges" command meant to convey, to present-day followers of the Lord? What is to be their attitude to the needy and to the outcast? What is the nature of the provision awaiting those who are brought to the table of the Great Host of the soul?

XIV

THE TOWER-BUILDER: AND THE KING GOING TO WAR

Luke 14: 28–35

COUNTING THE COST

In the Scripture Cited Above, We Have Two Parables and an Exhortation. They follow in natural order and sequence, and are dovetailed, the one into the other, with rare artistry, and unerring craftsmanship.

I. The Tower-Builder. The story opens of itself, and presents a picture with which we are all more or less familiar. As was His custom, Jesus spake the parable, *primarily,* for those who heard it, and not for future generations. The lesson taught was intended for the multitudes who followed our Lord, to and fro in the land, without thought or consideration. But it has had important and salutary lessons for every age of the Christian Church, lessons which retain their point and purpose in our own day.

In New York City there is a huge building occupying most of a city block, and which has been run up to the height of twenty-two stories. But there is no glass in the windows, only part of the roof is on, and the floorings are merely a host of rough, temporary boards. Thus much of the work was done more than four years since, but building operations are now at a standstill. Quite evidently, the builder, or those responsible for the construction of this pile, did not look far enough ahead. The building is called "High Towers" and exactly illustrates

the parable which Jesus of Nazareth spake, as recorded in vs. 28–30 of the chapter cited above.

This Business Builder embarked on an important enterprise with high hopes. His imagination was in fine play, and, on paper, his proposed scheme looked to be a positive "cinch." He enlisted his friends' interest in the project and put his own money into it, right to the limit of his resources. When reminded of the gigantic character of his undertaking, and of how a number of similar concerns had gone up in smoke or crumbled to ruin, he smiled good-naturedly, laughed to scorn all possible perils, made light of potential difficulties, and refused to regard them as having any application to *him*. But matters became complicated, money tight, and a tide of adverse circumstances began to inch up about his feet, and found him utterly unready to "raise up a standard" against them. The outcome of it all is that, to-day, his tower stands unfinished, a startling monument to the folly of unpreparedness.

There is a Type of Life Builder who pursues much the same course. He makes his plans with a light heart, and imagines them to be quite easy of accomplishment. The careful planning of his contemporaries is nothing to him. If they so determine, let them go warily, and safeguard against impending trouble, just as they see fit. Such timorous methods are not for him. He feels himself well able to look after himself, and if required take a chance or two, or even more. Of the conclusion he takes little or no thought. The end, he believes, will take care of itself. But the entire structure of his thinking is a lath-and-plaster temple of folly. The end will *not* take care of itself, any more than the beginning. Without reasonable anticipation, without adequate provision, without a careful, properly-directed look ahead, life will result in chaos and disaster. Any instances which may have

resulted contrariwise, serve only to demonstrate the verity of the general rule. Examples of men and women who, while wonderfully gifted and competent to achieve conspicuous present-day successes, failed to take into account the hour of waning powers and to provide against "the menace of the years," abound on every side. "Now the day is over, night is drawing nigh," voices a sentiment which, in the lisping days of childhood, was a comforting strain. It takes on another and a tragic significance, as the curtains of life are being slowly drawn.

An Unfinished Building, on which no construction work is being forwarded, is a public eyesore. Nobody likes it, nobody cares to gaze on it. The smallest structure, the most unpretentious building is if completed of more consequence in the world than the huge unfinished pile. It matters not, moreover, that the edifice was splendidly, even elaborately planned. The more ambitious the beginning, the more lamentable, the greater the mockery of the failure. It chants, continually, the dirge of the unfulfilled.

An unfinished life is an even more tragical spectacle. A promising, or a half-run career, come utterly to grief, is an occurrence which should cause all men (worthy the name) who may be aware of it, poignant regret and deep-seated sorrow. Unfortunately, there are those who make such an event an occasion for elation and mirth. You will recall that when Pliable reëntered the City of Destruction, with the mire of his journeyings clinging to his raiment, the city was moved about him, and we read that some called him foolish for going, and others reproached him for turning back. But one may easily fancy that there were but very few ready to take Pliable back to their hearts in wholly downright fashion. For the most part, his fellow-townsmen never forgot the fact of his failure, and as he went in and out among them, kept him

posted as to their proper feeling with regard to him. Virtually the whole of its inhabitants never left the City of Destruction; but, for one who *did*, only to return in shameful failure they had nothing but contempt. "This man began to build and was not able to finish." "Ye did run well, who did hinder you, that ye did not believe the truth?"

Counting the Cost. In the instance of both the unfinished building and the unfinished life, the cause is the same—a failure adequately to count the cost. That which costs nothing, is worth nothing. In the realm of mundane affairs, that fact stands like stone. Everything has its price, and it is incumbent upon all who engage in a costly and arduous undertaking, to take stock of their resources not only for present needs but future demands. A hand-to-mouth policy usually terminates with the former as far away from the latter as it can well be. "Will my funds last?" "Can I meet, with fortitude and ultimate overcoming, the dire and evil day?" "There will be foul weather, recalcitrant helpers, and scarcity of material to be reckoned with. Can I stand the gaff?" "Shall I be able to weather the storm?" These, and kindred questions a man had need to ask himself, whether he set out to build a tower or a life. Nothing, in construction work can safely be left to chance, and jerry-building both in towers or men is just another way of inviting the attention of every wind that blows. No scholarship is acquired without assiduous study; no professional distinction is attained, except at the cost of unceasing practice and unremitting application. No man ever makes a success of anything without much planning and great effort. Everything, we repeat, has its price—even evil has it. Lost virtue, respect, reputation, character, destiny—are these free gifts of the fates or the gods, think you? Be not deceived. For all idle pleasure,

neglected opportunity, wasted years—*someone has surely to pay.*

In this parable Jesus, as usual, is pointing out, and stressing truths which we have only to open our eyes to see in active operation on every hand. The matter of a Christian profession and a spiritual experience is a costly one. The higher the ideal we erect for ourselves, the more important and commanding the position we assume, the greater the outlay we must face. And if we do not count the cost, we shall never be able to carry out our resolves. The work of faith is a *life*-work. Moreover, let every man weigh this solemn fact: the disbursements necessary for completion will be heavy; the profession and maintenance of the Christian life is a costly one, and in some instances, may involve a terrific outlay. Yet none can assert that the estimates for a successful building of the tower of Christian life and character have been kept in the background in Holy Scripture. They are clearly drawn and faithfully presented. It will cost a man his sins; it will cost a man his love of ease; it will cost a man his self-righteousness; it will cost a man the favour of the world; it will cost a man (for the most part) the desires of his own heart. It will require courage, and faithfulness, and honest dealing with God, and fortitude and great faith—"not for a day, not for an hour, but always."

Yet if a man count the cost, he may count, also, on the aid and succour he may richly find. The service of Christ has its sorrows, but it has its joys; it has its hours of self-denial, but it has, also, its days of serenity and deep-seated joy. The way may be narrow, but it is straight; it has no devious turnings, nor dark forebodings, nor haunting spirits, but the "promise of the life that now is and that which is to come." "I reckon," said one, who had large experience of the world's trials, "that

the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Can language go further? And it is not the language of a fanatic or a fool, but the divinely inspired word of one who had learned that overcoming involves counting the cost, and the possession of a spirit of resolute continuance, until the topstone of the tower is brought on with shouts of rejoicing.

II. The King Going to War. As in the parable preceding, we are brought to face, here, the importance of counting the cost. Von Moltke, the great German military strategist, chose for his motto—*Erst wägen, dann wagen*—"first weigh, then venture," and his adherence to its principle enabled him to achieve wonderful victories. Cautious, careful, almost tardy in preparation, but bold, daring, almost reckless in execution the moment his resolve was made, von Moltke stands out—despite any or everything achieved in the World War—as the first soldier of modern times. In the teaching of Jesus here set forth, however, deliberation and adequate preparation in an ordinary sense, are not all. There is this further implication: the caution and deliberation we all exercise, are to be of a character which has the stamina and fighting strength to face a force which, ostensibly, is possessed of twice the strength of our own. It entails not only going into battle, but into battle against tremendous odds. "What king going to make war against another king sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?"

Is this a dispiriting picture? Not at all. Despite Napoleon's assertion that "heaven was on the side of the

big battalions," the greatest victories the world has witnessed, whether in the material or the moral sphere, have been those in which the ten thousand have engaged the twenty, where, one man, standing alone, has withstood the many. Instances almost innumerable could be cited; but the principle is so susceptible of supporting evidence as to require no further demonstration. But here, again, the chief lesson is *not* to be drawn from what, on the face of things, is the outstanding characteristic of the parable. The heroism implied in the king's proposal to engage a far superior force is *not* the central truth here, nor yet the outcome of the conflict, whether it be victory or defeat. It is *counting the cost.* The king must sit down, and realize that so far as the welfare of his army is concerned, it will matter little whether he lose or win. In either event, if he send them into battle his force will, in all probability, be virtually destroyed. What matters is, that nothing is being undertaken rashly, or in hot blood, and with inconsiderate haste. There may be disaster, but no surprise. There may be a *staking* of all, but there can be no *losing* of all because there are certain elements in the venture that are vital, and eternal, that can never die.

The second clause of this passage is a difficult Scripture, and one to which it is not easy to give a spiritual application. In physical warfare, the passage indicates a course of conduct, feasible enough: "Or else, while the other is yet a long way off, he sendeth an embassage, and desireth conditions of peace." But surely, Jesus was not teaching the validity of yielding, or the advisability of treating with the enemy of souls, with a view to compromise and surrender? There can be no diplomatic exchanges between a man's soul and Satan, "and there is no discharge in that war."

The teaching appears to be that, of the two, it is better to make the best terms one can with the world, than hav-

ing pretended to renounce it, return to it in the hour of persecution, or danger, or stress, or storm. "The rich young man that could not find in his heart to part with his possessions for Christ's sake," says old Matthew Henry, "did better to go away sorrowing than to have stayed with Him dissembling." Possibly Jesus was simply borrowing an illustration from a familiar subject, and that we are not meant to stress it unduly, or to look further. Almost instantly Jesus returns to the thought of the necessity of *giving up all,* which is the ultimate antithesis of compromise.

Life is a hard warfare. There is no glossing over this fact. Even when no concern is felt for spiritual eventualities, human existence is a stiff, uphill climb. All men and women have their troubles, which they regard as being peculiarly harassing. Not a day passes but what any man, who is not a drifter or a loafer, meets up with a difficult situation. All of us are being constantly called upon to make decisions which are potentially fateful and which, when they issue in action, spell either disaster or success.

We Are All Attending the College of Hard Knocks. There is no getting out of it; we cannot play truant. No wealth, no position in society, can shield us or point out an easier or "more excellent way." We have to attend lectures whether we like it or not. How are we to act in the classes? Shall we cut them, and flee like cowards? That will do us no good, for the knocks will follow us and become harder and still harder. No; there is nothing to be gained by playing the craven, except it be an increased toll of difficulty. The only way open to us is to stand up to life—to embrace the service—to calculate the force of the hard knocks, and prepare ourselves the better to bear them. We can ignore them, and they refuse to pass us by.

Success Such As Jesus Desired for every human being is dependent upon careful planning, and attained by an advance appraisal of the entire situation, in order to bring about the best possible results. The Master was continually urging His disciples to preparedness and watchfulness, to a calm and reasoned plan of campaign which would emerge in triumph and the laurels of the victor.

The Great Difference between the creed which Christ taught and other creeds lies in the stress and urgency He lays on planning and working. Mohammedanism cuts the nerve of energetic planning when it emphasizes fatalism. If a man's destiny be prearranged and preordained, of what avail is conscious effort? Buddhism urges resignation, repose, stagnation, sleep, forgetfulness. "Lie down and slumber," says Buddha, "and forget your misery." "Arise and fight with a brave heart," says Jesus. The Son of God goes goes forth to war! "So fight I," says Paul, "not as one that beateth the air." For the great Apostle, life and adherence to Christ and His Gospel was a *fight*, not days and years of slippered ease. Similarly with all of us who, to-day, whole-heartedly profess to be followers of the Master. But mere feelings should never be taken for faith, nor convictions for grace. By all means possible to us, we should instil and cultivate the life of God in the soul. But we must see to it that we take due cognizance of what true discipleship entails; we must accept it and its guerdon with due regard to the battle and the toil. 'Tis just and right to say "I will go," 'tis equally important and fateful that we add: "And I will count the cost."

"But If the Salt Has Lost His Savour—" The necessity of counting the cost is enforced by this picture of neglecting to do so. The man who has once made a profession of discipleship but has afterwards gone back

from it is like salt that has lost its "savour." Such material is worthless and practically useless; such a man is "neither fit for the land nor the dunghill." Little wonder that our Lord said, "He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

This truth, though painful is eminently useful, and needful to be known. A Christian, fallen away from his profession, is a difficult man to aid. One can tell him nothing he does not know; one can show him nothing he has not seen. He has turned from Christ with his eyes open; he has sinned against a known, not an unknown God. Let us ponder these things well; they are not sufficiently considered. Let us never be afraid of beginning to serve Christ. But let us begin seriously, thoughtfully, and with a due consideration of the step we take and of the cost that it will entail. But having once begun, let us pray for continuing grace, that we may persevere, and progress, and never fall away.

Questions. What is the connecting thought running through both these parables and the concluding exhortation? To whom did it primarily apply? What is the nature of the first parable—that is, what figure is employed? What quality did the man who failed to finish his tower, lack? What instance of a similar and present-day delinquency is cited in the study? What attitude did the Tower Builder adopt toward remonstrating friends? In what other sphere of building is the lesson stressed here, applicable? What, chiefly, causes a failure to finish? What, besides present care, is necessary to successful building? How does an unfinished building affect a spectator? And how, an "unfinished" life or career? What illustration from Bunyan's *Pilgrim* is cited in the study? How was Pliable received by his fellow townsmen? What does counting the cost imply? Can the practice be safely dispensed with? What is the universal condition in relation to unpreparedness and lack of forethought? If a man count the cost, what else may he count on? In the picture of the king going to war, what world-condition is exemplified? Is it a dispiriting picture or one having ample

historical justification? What is the possible teaching of the incident of the embassage? What, however, is the paramount thought just here? How is "counting the cost" shown to be a universally desirous thing? What is the penalty of lightly undertaking a task and falling away? How is this brought out and elaborated by Jesus in the concluding verses of this passage?

XV

THE LOST SHEEP, THE LOST COIN, THE LOST BOY

Luke 15: 1–32

RESCUE WORK

The Chapter Containing These Three Parables, is, possibly, the best known of any in Holy Scripture. It has done more good to the souls of men, perhaps, than any other. For in addition to its continual usage in the public ministrations of the sanctuary, and its popularity in the province of private reading and study, it has been given a universal application in hospitals, prisons, Rescue Missions and other institutions, where those who most closely represent temporarily lost, yet potentially recoverable values (which is the general theme of the chapter), are to be found assembled.

As He moved to and fro among the cities and towns and villages of the Holy Land, Jesus saw many men who had been thrust forth from the synagogue, from the accustomed haunts of men, who were running to waste. These He desired to restore. He sought them out, helped them, healed them, enheartened them, and gave daily evidence of the character of His earthly mission as expressed in His own words: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." The testimony of the scribes and Pharisees, concerning Jesus, as recorded in the second verse of the chapter which is the basis of the present study, was strictly and literally true. And it remains true: "This man receiveth sinners." It is His special office so to do. For this end came He into the world.

What He was upon earth, He is now at God's right hand. He is, emphatically, the sinners' friend.

The Jewish leaders, however, spake this word of Jesus, in scorn and contempt, and not at all in the spirit of the magnificent tribute it really is. In reply to this alleged taunting remark of His enemies, Jesus spake the three parables we are about to consider. All three are meant to throw light on the same great truth—the Master's willingness to seek and to save sinners.

Rescue Mission Work. The three parables are eminently suggestive of the character and specific aims of this branch of Christian activity. In each instance, they present an account of something of value being lost, of a diligent search being made for its whereabouts, of its being recovered, and of the rejoicing which followed its restoration. This procedure is typical also of what is being promoted in Rescue Missions all over the land.

This work claims the sympathy and aid of all the churches. Some years ago, Samuel Hopkins Hadley—in quite a few respects the most remarkable man the work of Rescue Missions has yet produced—attended a great gathering of Sunday school workers in the Middle West. One of the topics set down for discussion was: "What Becomes of Our Elder Scholars?" When he rose to speak, Hadley startled the gathering with his opening words: "You want to know what becomes of your elder scholars," he said. "Well, I can't answer the question *fully,* perhaps. But I can tell you what becomes of many hundreds—aye, thousands—of 'em. *We get 'em down in Water Street.* Lost, drunken, outcast, down-and-out—the boys of your homes, your elder scholars!"

Hadley was right, as every Mission worker in America can testify. Three-fourths of the men who drift into the Mission halls of this country, have passed through Sunday schools. Thousands have, at one time or another, been

church members. They have had praying mothers, helpful influences, a decent education, and a good send-off on the voyage of life. These now battered craft, so to speak, once put out to sea like golden argosies, laden with the precious freight of a life's possibilities and good resolves. But adverse winds and disaster awaited them; so that, after running with bare poles before the merciless tempest, they are forced, in the end, to make the friendly haven of a Rescue Mission. To these, must be added the crassly ignorant, the tough, the gutter-snipe, the wharf-rat. But when all of this latter class has been accounted for, the great majority of the great horde to be found in the Rescue halls of the country are represented in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel by the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost boy. As already stated, the three stories illustrate the same truth, and it is here proposed to take them together, as three aspects of the same principle of ruin, rescue, and recovery. This course is rendered the more advisable by the fact that the parable of the Prodigal is dealt with at length in a subsequent study.

The Keynote of the Whole is the sentence, "This man receiveth sinners," and the words should be carefully noted and borne in mind. They throw the light of interpretation on all that follows. The Pharisees found fault with Jesus for receiving sinners. In reply, the Master, in effect, declares that the thing that they found fault with, was the very thing He came on earth to do, and was something of which He was not ashamed. He came to do for men what the shepherd did for his lost sheep, the woman did for her lost money, and the father did for his wandering boy. As for His murmuring enemies, they were like the Elder Brother of the Prodigal Son.

The commentator Bengel holds that the lost sheep represents the stupid, foolish kind of wanderer; the lost piece of money as one largely ignorant of himself and

passive in the hands of those who handle him, the young son as the daring and wilful adventurer. It is a reasonable view, one having much to commend it. In any event all Rescue Mission workers are familiar with these types and have numberless examples pass through their hands.

But it would seem as though there is much more to be said, and that the meaning of the Master may be supposed to be as follows: "You blame me for receiving sinners. I do not deny it. I am not ashamed of it. I *do* receive them. If you would know my feeling toward the erring ones, mark the conduct of a shepherd seeking a lost sheep, a woman seeking for her lost money, a kind father receiving with open arms a returning prodigal son. In the love exhibited in each of these three cases, you have an emblem of my love and concern for wayward men." Surely the teaching of this chapter may be given that construction! Moreover: the work of Rescue Missions may be described as reflecting this spirit, as working for the perpetuation of it, and as bringing to bear upon their activities, the unwearying search, the tender solicitude and the welcoming attitude of restoration which were characteristic of their Master and Lord.

The Mission Worker Strives to Obey the plain, understandable teaching of Jesus. He seeks the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost boy. And having found them, he proceeds to regard them (as Dr. Oswald Dykes used to put it) as "the Lord's residuary legatees." In them, the Master is still to be found on earth; through them, He will accept His followers' gratitude. The destitute, degraded and even criminal classes must be made to realize that they have no such friend on this earth to be compared with Jesus Christ; that if they *have* any friends on this planet, they are such as Jesus sends them, who desire to aid and befriend them for the Master's sake. The Mission worker, we repeat, realizes all this and

goes on working in the spirit of his realization. He aims to act so as to bring the lost and straying to believe that the followers of the Lord have accepted the charge that He has left behind upon the hearts and consciences of all who love Him—that they search for, care for, work for these erring ones, His brethren, even as for Himself.

Christian Duty Lies That Way. Of course, one concedes it to be no easy way. One realizes that what is sometimes apt to cool hearts in which Christ's love glows, is the ingratitude they encounter, the scorning of the very love that prompts it all, by those for whom they search and toil. There are times, unquestionably, when the best-intentioned efforts and even physical benefactions are received with a thanklessness which tramples upon goodness and knows no shame. In such an hour, it is well to remember that at no time is the servant greater than his Lord. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not," and to those who strive to follow Him, to-day, the lost and erring are, not seldom, quite apt to be as unreceptive and ungracious.

But, After All, This is True Only of a Portion. And if it were more generally true than it is, such a condition would furnish no valid reason for ceasing to search and pity and work unceasingly and uncomplainingly. The teaching of this great parabolic sequence is plain enough, just here. "And go after that which is lost, *until he find it.*" "And sweep the house and seek diligently *until she find it.*" "And *when he was yet a great way off,* his father saw him, and *ran,* and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Real, pitiable, patent need claims the help of Christ's servants, whether it be deserving or not. It can never harm to soothe pain, to assuage sorrow, to appease hunger, to clothe the naked, to lend a hand.

Over the Wayward, the Sorrowing, the Lost and Miserable Sons of Men, Christ would have the hearts

of His people yearn and bleed. For it cannot be forgotten that, even in these lost ones, there dwells the ineffaceable human image of the Divine, which (in how changed a form!) He Himself condescended to wear. Freely we have received of Him; freely must we give. Across the centuries His voice still rings, and His message to them that serve Him and name His Name, is as it was in the days of old: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto them, ye have done it unto me."

Such is the Teaching of These Parables as they apply to the work of Rescue Missions. And in the spirit of it, the Church of Christ should know, this fine phase of Christian activity is still being carried on. It was thought that when the Eighteenth Amendment had become written into the Constitution of our country, the work of Rescue Mission halls would be rendered obsolete. That anything of the kind, or anything even remotely approaching it, has come to pass, only the wilfully ignorant or the callously indifferent would be prepared to contend. The lost and erring still crowd the mission halls, and there is as great a necessity for their work to be continued, as heretofore. To the fact that it is still *being* continued, corroborative testimony abounds on every hand.

We Speak Whereof We Know, and Testify of That We Have Seen. We have seen men rise from their shaking, uncertain knees, in the Mission halls of this our land, clothed in power, and manhood, and resolution, and conquering grace. We have seen the palsied hand cease its trembling, the drunkard's craving smitten dead for evermore. We have known the scales of a moral leper to drop away from him, and his flesh return unto him, like unto that of a little child. We have gazed upon a Magdalen, her stained and shameful past submerged beneath a tide of sweet forgiveness, with her life made

chaste and pure. We have seen and known all this, and the vision and the knowledge thus acquired rear for us a stronghold of impregnable belief such as no assault of doubt can ever conquer, and from which we shall not be moved.

This Final Word: It is, we contend, plainly evident, that the perpetuation of the teaching of these three parables in the work of Rescue Missions is a splendid witness for the Church of Christ in this our day. It constitutes one of the strongest planks in the platform of Christian evidences. The unanswerable argument for the continuing efficacy of the Spirit of Jesus in the earth is the transformed life, the blind man seeing, the leper cleansed. An unbeliever in the things of the Spirit may argue for a year, if it suit him to do so, against religion and creed, and the rest of it. But when he has exhausted himself and his powers of asserting that "there is nothing in it," he will still have the miracle of the redeemed thief and drunkard to account for. And, outside of Christ, he cannot even *begin* to account for it at all.

Let us, then, strive to know more, ourselves, of the power that is in Christ, and learn more of His love. It is love, and it is power which transcends knowledge, undoubtedly, but on them we must rest our souls, and gather enheartenment from the thought, that the change in the hearts and lives of men which the world calls foolishness, is something over which angels rejoice, and heaven thrills with joy.

Questions. What special ministry does the chapter containing our study exercise? What contemptuous remark, made scornfully by the scribes and Pharisees led to Jesus' utterance of these parables? To what specific form of Christian activity are they made to apply? What great truth do the three stories combine to illustrate? What relation does this specific work bear to the churches? Why should the interest of the latter be extended to them, as shown in this

study? What, in conversational form, is the cardinal teaching advanced here, by Jesus? What is the mission worker's attitude to the lost, and straying, and prodigal? How is he to regard his work, and in what temper continue it? What effect should this work have on the professing Christian, not engaged in it? What in the main, is the evidence furnished by Rescue Missions that Christ's spirit is still at work in the earth? What supernatural accompaniment, does Jesus declare, hails the repentance of a sinner?

XVI

THE PRODIGAL SON AND HIS BROTHER

Luke 15: 11–32

FLAMING AND COMPLAINING YOUTH

Of All Parables in the New Testament, this is most instructive. Charles Dickens once described it as being the finest short story ever written. It is truly a mighty spiritual picture. Unlike many of our Lord's parables, it does not teach one cardinal truth only, but many. Every part of the narrative is charged with rich, ageless instruction. Usually, it is known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and the truly masterful fashion in which the career of the erring boy is sketched, entitles it, perhaps, to the name it bears. But there are other great lessons to be learned from it as, for example, the character and mental attitude of the Elder Brother. But the paramount truth centers in neither of the two sons, but in the love, graciousness, tolerance, and forgiveness of the Father.

The Period of Youth is truly wonderful—wonderful in its outlook, courage, enthusiasms, opportunities, potentialities. The later years bring other and admirable qualities in their train—among them, perchance, a large tolerance, a matured judgment, an experience, laden with the spoils of the passing years. But in no other period of human life, do the four attributes, first-mentioned, so prodigally abound, nor to any other age do they so rightfully and naturally belong.

" When all the world is young, lad,
And all the leaves are green,
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen;
It's hey! for whip and spur, lad,
And round the world away:
Young blood must have its fling, lad,
And every dog his day."

Youth is fraught with magnificent augury, and those of us who find ourselves " in the midst of the years," stand by and watch with admiration not unmixed with a laudable envy, the glory and radiance of its fervour. Jesus Christ showed Himself to be in abounding sympathy with youth. For one thing, He was young Himself. He did all His work in the morning of life's day; and at a time when, in this modern age, most men are merely starting to make for themselves a name, He had accomplished His stupendous earthly mission, and had returned to the bosom of the Father.

Jesus was concerned for youth, not to hamper its action nor to prevent its development, but to prevent the casting away of its sublime possibilities. The roadmender sets crimson lamps and scarlet flags at points of possible peril, not to impede locomotion, but to warn travellers of existent danger and potential disaster. The governments of this, and of other lands, place lighthouses and bell-buoys along their coasts, not to hinder navigation, but to save storm-tossed mariners from wreck and death. Similarly, the world's Greatest Story-Teller, has given to mankind the Parable of the Prodigal and the Prodigal's Brother, in order that the youth of all ages might the better resist the follies of the one, and desist from harbouring the spirit of the other.

Here Are Two Types of Youth. 1. *The flaming type* which assumes that unless it sins it has not freedom; that is straitened and cramped (or imagines itself so) in

an atmosphere of goodness and happy domesticity; that demands a portion it has not earned, and for which it has not laboured. In reality, the prodigal had no claim to the goods which he declared fell to him. He was not the first-born, to begin with, and only out of the goodness of the father's heart, was he able to become the possessor of ready money. It may be said, in passing, that in all probability, it was just here that the enmity of the elder brother had its genesis. He had perforce, to stand by, and see a goodly portion of the family patrimony lost forever to the family heritage. The prodigal, we repeat, had no genuine title to what was freely given him. Moreover, he was just the type which would have bitterly resented and denied any such claim, had it been made upon himself.

What did he want his portion for? To put to sound commercial use, and so gain another portion? To go forth, and make for himself a name and goodly standing in the world? Not at all. It was in order that he might burn it up; that he might enjoy a riotously good time on what had been assembled with assiduous and painstaking effort, by another.

Flaming youth is a fierce fire which, presently, consumes money, health, reputation, character, and everything else with which it comes into contact. Meanwhile, it launches forth into the world, boldly sufficient unto itself. It embarks on a life of self-gratification; it accepts guidance solely from its own casual impulses and short-sighted longings; it has no thought of the appalling waste it evinces, nor of the pain it is inflicting upon others; nor, moreover, of the ruin and misery awaiting it, somewhere along the road. "And [he] took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance in riotous living." Flaming youth produces nothing but ashes—the useless ort of the thing it burns.

2. *Complaining youth*—crabbed, contemptuous, envious, self-centered youth. We are all aware of the prominence which the Church of God has given to the conduct, example and the warning attaching thereto furnished by the prodigal. It is high time for larger attention to be paid to the character and conduct of the elder brother. The man didn't amount to much; that is, in so far as he is pictured in the parable. He stayed at home, 'tis true; but of gratitude, graciousness, brotherliness, he had little or none. We have referred to the natural resentment he possibly felt at his brother's departure for the far country, taking with him what should have "stayed down on the farm." Having made due allowance for this feeling we have perforce to bid adieu to the good qualities of the elder brother.

Complaining, dissatisfied youth puts a blight on all it touches. Moreover, it usually is a thin veneer which covers malice, envy, jealousy, hatred. "Thou never gavest *me* a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." The fact probably was, that he never wanted to make merry, or had any friends, at least, of a sort that took any pleasure in feasts. But what a wealth of suggestion is here! It calls to mind the girl who says petulantly: "I do not have this, or that, such as my girl friends have," while, as a matter of fact she has far more than ninety-nine one-hundredths of her sisters, the wide world over, Then there is the young man who complains of his having been tied down; of his lack of a proper chance; of his inability to get into the swim. "I have no man to put me into the pool . . . while I am coming another steppeth down before me." In *his* case, the truth of the matter is that he has had too much, and that altogether too regularly. There are a thousand and one things which, instead of valuing and being thankful for, he sets in discontented comparison with the heritage and lot of

another, whose worldly affluence is greater than his own. Crabbed, complaining, envious youth!

There is tenable ground, in this parable, on which to rear the assumption that the elder brother's service had been one out of sympathy with his tasks, and with the father who set him to it. And there is sufficient of the Pharisee in most of us to justify the application to ourselves. It is needful to convince ourselves that it is not service that wins God's love. That is ours already. "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Perfunctory service is not the test either of loyalty or sonship. It has neither the riotous pleasure nor the fatted calf. When work for God is undertaken at the behest of the highest motive, we learn to find our joy in Him, and our highest reward in the sunshine of His smile.

The Father's Attitude. (1) *To the Prodigal.* For the wretched and repentant lad, the father has no recrimination, no reproach, no word of abuse, no "I told you so." With the father, it is as if the past had never been, for the boy had come to himself. The father desired to utterly forget the past and to enrich the present with marks of love and favour, and welcome. He runs to meet him; he enfolds him in fond and fatherly embrace; the best robe, the costly ring, the comforting sandals, the fatted calf all are lavished on the boy who had found his way home. "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." A loving and forbearing father was once taken to task by a righteously indignant friend. "If that were *my* lad," he stormed, "I would throw him out of the house." "If he were *your* lad," returned the father quietly, "I might do as you suggest. But you see, he's *mine.*"

There is a lesson here, too, that we can learn with large profit to our souls. In the generality of things, and whatever may be the attitude of the father, the rest of the

family affiliations are quite prone to adopt such measures as to prevent the returning prodigal from overlooking the fact of his having erred. As for forgetting the past, the prevailing practice is, on the contrary, to hunt up the record and to make a mountain out of a mole-hill. Even Christian men and women who adhere to a gospel of forgiveness and atonement, and who are, moreover, perfectly sincere in their adherence, find themselves quite unable to exercise it in the instance of the returning prodigal. They are reluctant even when not positively unwilling to employ an erstwhile jailbird, or to have aught to do with one who has wasted any of his substance in riotous living. "Once a thief, always a thief"—a black and vicious falsehood—finds a much larger acceptance than is usually imagined to be the case. A man *may* have a future, yet, save as God helps him, he must *not* have a past. But, always, the returning wanderer may rest himself assured of one thing—the loving welcome of the Father-God. "And when he was in affliction he besought the Lord, and humbled himself before his God, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." For the returning, repentant wanderer, there awaits the bestowal of the Father's pardon, enriched and glorified by the love of the Father's heart. "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother (my son) was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

(2) *To the Prodigal's Brother.* It is more than probable that the concluding portion of the parable was intended by Jesus to apply to the scribes and Pharisees, who murmured at our Lord for receiving sinners. The unkindness and self-sufficiency of the elder son, were in exact accord with the spirit manifested by those who

found fault with Jesus, for showing kindness to publicans and sinners.

The attitude of the son was thankless, conceited, self-righteous; that of the father, patient, tolerant, kind. The father answers the son's bitter words and rude reproaches in tones of pained yet gentle and encouraging remonstrance: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." If the distinction between the prodigal and the father is sharp, the disparity between the father and the elder brother is even still more pronounced. On the one hand there is a lack of charity, humility, generosity of spirit; on the other, abounding love and large forgiveness. The churlish, discontented boy says contemptuously, "This thy son"; the father gently, yet firmly corrects him, and says: "This thy brother." In effect, he asks why, in the enjoyment of abundance, this son of his should grudge his brother a welcome home?

In the final verse of the parable, he voices an unanswerable argument. Whatever the elder son might otherwise say, he could not deny two great facts—his brother, who a short time ago had been as one dead, was alive again; he had been lost, and was now found. "It was *meet* that we should make merry," says the father with finality. "No other reception were possible, or to be thought of. For this thy brother was dead and is alive again: and was lost and is found." Before these facts, the murmurings of the elder brother trail off into silence.

The Picture is True to All Life; it is emblematic of the great desire which the heavenly Father has for the offender's return and restoration to the abounding plenty of His house. It emphasizes the forbearance which the Father manifests toward the uncharitable members of the household of faith. And it gives us to see that the Christian man or woman who comes to see that we all stand by grace, that we all are debtors, that the best of

us has nothing to boast of and has nothing which he has not received—such a man, or such a woman will never be found growling and railing after the manner of the prodigal's brother. The return of any soul from the ways of wandering should be an occasion of joy to all who are already at home—not only to the Father but to all who claim sonship. Sonship must of necessity, imply and connote brotherhood. In the Father's house are many rooms and great good cheer, and above the lintel is the insignia of the Outstretched Arms!

Questions. What is the characteristic of this parable? What did a great writer once term it? What is its paramount truth? What are the outstanding qualities of the period of youth? What was Jesus' attitude toward it? Why, particularly? What types of youth are exemplified in this parable? For what purpose did the prodigal desire his "portion"? What befell him? What type does the elder brother represent? What are the characteristics of such? What was the character of his service, and what his attitude toward it and toward his father? What was the father's attitude toward the returning prodigal? Did he upbraid or receive him as though nothing tragic had occurred? There is a brief incident related here, what is its outstanding moral? What, in general, is the reception accorded a wanderer or delinquent, these days? How does this differ from the teaching of the parable? What was the father's attitude toward the elder brother? To whom was its teaching specially directed? What was the attitude of the stay-at-home son? How did the father meet it? How should returning wanderers be received? What is the eternal attitude of the Father?

XVII

THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR

Luke 16: 19–31

FIXITY OF CHARACTER

A New Gospel. When Jesus told the smug and eminently respectable Pharisees that God and mammon were irreconcilable—that to be affluent and of lordly position was no indication whatever of riches and honour in the world to come, they laughed Him to scorn. "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him." Whereupon our Lord, disdaining their sophistries and refusing to argue further with them, proceeds to the narration of one of the greatest of His parables,—a story which swept away the specious arguments of the Pharisees, as chaff is swept by an insistent breeze. We do well to remember, however, that the parable is not intended, primarily, to emphasize the dire consequences which follow the abuse of wealth and hard-hearted contempt of the poor, but to underscore the following thoughts: that men cannot arrange and reconcile, to their own satisfaction, their reverence for God and their love of self-gratification; that externals are not infallible indexes to character; that God's appraisals are just and—most important of all, perhaps;—that long-continued habit results in fixity of character, for good and for ill, in time and in eternity.

The Rich Man and the Beggar. Here is the only instance where Jesus gives a name to a parabolic character. The Master calls the beggar *Lazarus,* which means

"God has helped," by way of indicating what commended him to God. Tradition has found a name for the rich man, also,—*Ninevis*. More often he is styled *Dives*, but this, of course, is merely the Latin for "the rich man."

The Rich Man, as set before us in the parable, was not a bad man, nor one intended to typify a monstrous member of society. He was not a tyrant, he was not a usurer, he was not an oppressor of the poor. There is no intimation in the parable that he had amassed his wealth by trickery, or any other form of dishonesty. Had he been notoriously selfish or uncharitable, it is quite reasonable to suppose that no beggar would have been permitted to lie at his gate, day after day, beseeching alms. This rich man wore good clothes, chosen with a taste for conservatism and refinement—purple and fine linen—ate the best of food, and, to use a phrase we are all familiar with, "did himself proud." "He fared sumptuously every day."

Goodness Begat Wealth. A man such as is here described, was regarded by the Jews of our Saviour's day as being a good man. There could be no doubt about it! They believed, quite sincerely, that outward prosperity was a sign of inward goodness. This sleek, well-clad, well-fed, well-fixed Pharisee was wealthy because he was righteous, observant of the law, a true son of Abraham. The fact of his retaining his wealth connoted his inward worth. Had he been a sinner he must, of necessity, have lost it. No: in the Jews' eyes, loyalty to Jehovah brought in its train, riches and honour. The righteous had riches. Goodness and gold went hand-in-hand.

The Beggar. Lazarus was poor, wretched, diseased. It is, however, a mistaken notion to suppose him to have been a leper. In that event, he must have kept afar off, and durst not have lain at the rich man's gateway. The

poor fellow was just an ordinary beggar, to all outward seeming, and in all probability, he regarded the rich man's gateway as his regular "pitch"; for although no mention is made of how long he had lain there, it is evident that it was long enough for the rich man, as he passed in and out, to have grown so familiar with him that, later, he recognized him in "Abraham's bosom."

Badness Begat Poverty. But in any event, Lazarus was regarded as a sinner by those who passed him by. In this fact lay the very reason that the man found himself poor, diseased and wretched. He was a sinner. Just as they believed that goodness insured riches so, also, did the Jews believe that sin and evil living brought poverty in their train. This belief, that wealth denoted piety and sin poverty, was deeply-rooted in the thinking of the time. And it was held to cover, moreover, not only this world but the next. In the other world—the hereafter—a rich man would go on being good and being wealthy, a beggar would continue to sin and to be poor and diseased.

Drawing Aside the Curtain. The rich man and the beggar die, and in the parable, our Lord draws aside the curtain, and discloses to the view of His congregation the after-history of Dives and Lazarus. To the amazement of everyone, the positions of the two men are completely reversed! Here was a startling revelation—an innovation such as none could understand! The one who had been opulent, who, according to current belief, had just passed on to a still fuller possession of ease and luxury and wealth, was seen to be stripped of his wealth, and in place of ease had naught but torment. The other, whose life while on the earth had been one long-drawn-out misery, had been carried by the angels, to what constituted for a Jew, the height of seraphic bliss—a place in Abraham's bosom!

But This View Though New, Was (and Is) the Correct View. The impression which our Lord desired to leave with His hearers, and with us, is an eminently truthful and righteous one. That impression is this: a man's condition in this life may, and can be reversed in the world to come; and the teaching goes on to emphasize the fact that the determining principle in this matter of continuance or reversal in another world, is the *actual character* of a man in *this* world as opposed, it may be, to his reputation or externalities and the nature of the moral element and principle which ran through and dominated his life while on this earth. Christ gave His hearers to understand, in a fashion that admitted of no successful rebuttal, that their notions concerning goodness and wealth and *vice versa* were utterly erroneous; that many a wealthy man was bad at heart, many a poor man was good at heart; that neither the one condition nor the other was to be regarded either as a reward or a punishment; that a man was finally judged, not by his wealth or poverty, not by his social prominence or obscurity, but by what he *was,* in his inmost soul.

A glimpse of what this righteous and unerring law will effect, is to be seen in actual events and circumstances that transpire all about us, here on earth. Once in a while, we see a man of wealth and prominence shown up—exposed for what he really is—and the spectacle is a shameful and saddening one. "So the fool was stripped to his foolish hide." There may be some found to gloat over the uncovering process, but in the main, we don't care to witness it. On the other hand, we are not left without the witness of the examples of men who, despite unfavourable circumstances and adverse conditions, fail not to demonstrate their possession of a true nobility of character.

The Offence of the Rich Man was not (as we have stated already) that he was rich, but that he lived a self-indulgent and luxurious life, regardless of the misery around him. Had he so desired he could have alleviated the suffering of thousands, and have still remained a rich man, wanting absolutely for nothing, able, on the contrary, to secure whatever may have been the objective of his whim or desire. No, it was not wealth but wickedness; not sensuality but selfishness; not brutal bullying but cold indifference to his brother's pain which wrought his ruin, and brought him under the condemnation of the Great Assize.

The Merit of Lazarus was not found in the bare fact of his being poor, or wretched or diseased. In many an instance, before and since Lazarus' day, beggars have proved themselves to be as vile and filthy in heart as they were in body. And it *could* have happened that Lazarus deserved to be reckoned among such as these. No; Lazarus' merit was not in his poverty. It lay in the fact that when lying at the rich man's gateway, with none to tend him, hungrily eyeing the feast and licked of dogs, Lazarus had found his help in God.

"Son, Remember!" These two words, standing in conjunction, form a tremendous, an almost awe-inspiring sentence. Sir James Barrie says something about memory having been given to man in order "that he might have roses in December." But that can never be more than a conditional experience. One cannot have roses in December, or at any other time, except when rose-bearing plants are first planted. Evil deeds leave evil memories, that blossom rather more after the order of the deadly nightshade than the lovely rose.

The obvious teaching, just at this point, is, that had Dives but given Lazarus equality with him in time, he would have had some right to sharing with him in the

land of spirits. But "thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

The Impassable Gulf. "But beside," the thing were impossible. It could not be done. The results produced by character and lifelong habit could not be expunged nor got over in the easy way suggested by Dives. The consequences of a self-centred life of ease and indifference to contemporary suffering, cannot be lifted, reversed, or eliminated the moment they become irksome or distressing. In Jean Ingelow's beautiful poem *Divided*, we are shown a pair of lovers who, to begin with, walk hand-in-hand, on either side of a narrow rivulet. Soon the stream widens, and the lovers are compelled to drop hands. The rivulet now becomes a river, and, finally, a mighty torrent, rushing toward the sea, forever dividing the lovers, who lose sight of each other across the expanded waters of the estuary, "as songs of mariners winnow the air."

The Law of the Impassable Gulf is Operative All Around Us. There is, for example, *the physical gulf, lying between youth and age.* After a certain period in life, it is a matter impossible for a man to become an athlete. The ruthless character of the demands that violent physical exercise makes upon our muscular resources, absolutely prohibit those advanced in years from attempting to meet them. We are all familiar with the sexagenarian's resolve to take up golf, which results only in demonstrating the more acutely, that his day of athletic grace is past. No; in a thousand ways we are always being reminded that between youth's physical achievements and age's desire to emulate them, there is a great gulf fixed.

Then there is the mental barrier. We come to a certain milestone on life's highway, and, unless, ere reaching it, we have learned how to apply our thinking powers

to matters of graver import than are represented by the elementary problems of existence, the opportunity for doing so, is forever past. "So that they who would pass from hence . . . cannot."

Finally, there is the impassable moral gulf which can come to lie between a man's desires and his powers and opportunities for fulfilling them. Let a man disregard certain laws and conventions which, by the endorsement of generations of mankind, have proved their indispensability to the welfare of the race, and he will do so at his peril, and to his ultimate, bitter cost. There comes a time when he will begin to chafe under the fetters of habit and passion, and to long for deliverance; when, weary of restlessness, he is ready to exchange storm and tumult for the calm of the harbour. He turns himself about, and essays to make the change. But the thing is altogether beyond him. The wish may be father to the thought; but neither the wish, *nor* the thought, is sufficiently potent to bring forth the act. Between what he is, and what he would give his life, almost, to be, "there is a great gulf fixed."

These things are no more than the ordinary physical, mental and moral facts of our lives; and evidence of existence and continuance abound on every hand. A life of careless selfishness tends to a moral condition, a state of heart, a disposition of mind, a bent of soul, from which no sudden leap can bring a man into harmony with those who, through long years of cleansing suffering and ennobling endurance, have come to stand in a heritage of peace.

Fixity of Character. It is a grave charge that we are entrusted with—to determine, for time and eternity, what manner of abode is to be ours. Yet grave as it is, most of us are barely conscious of its being ours. Yet consciously or not, a man becomes settled in his ways

and habits. He acquires a certain turn and cast of character—good, bad, hard, generous—and it is almost a matter of human impossibility to change it. It acts out what he is; it reveals the secret of his heart; it colours, moreover, his entire outlook on life. A musician sees, or hears harmony wherever he goes. An artist sees pictures, loveliness, beauty,—everywhere. An evilly-minded man sees nothing but what is gross and carnal; a man of noble instincts sees good, even though it be only "in the inch," as Stevenson puts it. And so we pass through life, becoming more and more fixed and grounded in certain fundamental, ineradicable traits and indelible characteristics; and so we come to its end; and so we fare forth into the land of spirits where, standing in the incandescent light of eternity we are seen for what we really are. It is character that will count,—not clothes nor wealth, nor station in life, nor worldly honour—when a naked soul stands before God.

"Though One Rose From the Dead." This man Dives, the parable goes on to relate, desired, moreover, to communicate with his blood-kindred, in order that they could become enlightened as to the state of the dead, and the character of the life lived beyond the grave. Here, again, is manifested a concern which bestirred itself too late. Together with Dives' other requests, it were impossible of accomplishment; and even if it were not, it would prove but a useless gesture, and produce no traceable effect whatever. Echoes of this request and its futility are to be heard here, and in our own day. "If only I could really *know* what is behind the curtain," says one; and another, "If I were *certain* about the alleged penalties for wrong-doing, I should mend my ways."

Would you? We wonder! It is gravely questionable that mankind would proceed to material change in moral attitude and conduct, even though the last detail con-

cerning the world to come were fully revealed. Men engaged in hazardous callings are uniformly more indifferent to danger, than those who make a living in ways less fraught with potential catastrophe. And this, too, in full knowledge of the facts. The parable is true to the things that are in this phase of its teaching, as in the rest. "And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." No revelation of the fate awaiting the evil-doer, unfixes his innermost affections from unworthy and sordid objects or fixes them on God and all higher things. Only the revelation of God, in the richest sense of the term, can teach us to set our affections on Him. Only by knowing Him can we learn to love Him; and only by loving Him are we brought to a state of mind and heart that shall fit us for spending an eternity in His presence, freed forever from the taint of sin.

Questions. What led up to Jesus' narration of this parable? What are its chief lessons? What is the meaning of the word "Lazarus" and the word "Dives"? What were the general characteristics of the rich man? What principle, believed in by the Jews, did he represent? What, in inverse ratio, were Lazarus' traits and what the thought implied by his condition? When Jesus drew aside the curtain of the future, what, chiefly, was revealed? What new thought and view did this furnish? How is this exemplified in daily life? What was the rich man's offence? What was Lazarus' virtue or basis of reward? What are memory's functions? How is the thought of the impassable gulf emphasized in daily life? We come now, to the paramount teaching of the parable: what is it? How does it work out? What would be the probable effect of one returned from the dead, on the minds and consciences of the living? What are the only factors which fit us for a continuous dwelling in the presence of God?

XVIII

THE SERVANT RETURNED FROM PLOUGHING

Luke 17:7–10

EXTRA SERVICE

Duty Toward God. This parable was intended by Jesus to impress His hearers with the importance that attached to their having a rightful conception of their duty toward God. The Master strove to show them that any, and all service rendered to Him, was obligatory and not optional; was—in the last analysis—altogether a matter of duty, and *not* of favour. It was a mighty hard and difficult business to bring a Jew to see and admit *that*. His notion was, that whether engaged in business, pleasure or religious exercises, he was bestowing his gracious favour on whoever, or whatever, happened to be immediately involved in the process. His lordly condescension, even in matters of worship, was a thing to behold! He presumed, even, to patronize Jehovah!

Jesus Flatly Censured This Attitude. In this passage, brief as it is, He concentrates on the fact that it is not so much the spirit in which God deals with His servants that matters, as it is a question of the spirit in which the servants serve God—not what God thinks of their work, but rather how they regard it themselves. The Christian belongs to God; therefore God has a right to all the service he can render. And when he has rendered it all, he may not indulge in self-complacency, as if he had done something having extraordinary merit,

which deserved special commendation. In all cases and in all places, everywhere and at all times, he and his service, both, are the property of God. "Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that we commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye . . ."

The Nature and Claims of Service. To attain such an attitude as that outlined above, is no easy task. The tendency of even the best among us, is in another direction. Moreover: our everyday experiences serve to confirm us in this attitude and lead us to attempt its justification. In almost any human relationship one could name, when we have done what, rightfully, we consider to be our share, we quit. We do not expect to be asked to do more; if we are, we register a silent, if not an audible protest; we feel put on and aggrieved; and should we proceed to perform the duty, we find it to be irksome and to have become a burden. The great majority of us share this feeling.

Sorts of Service. Conceding this position, directs our attention, with increased emphasis, to this fact: our parable has nothing whatever to do with, or to say about, idling, or loafing. It is wholly concerned with *service,* and a consideration of its character and claims. There is teaching here, the implication of which is, to the effect that a man may be quite busy *doing nothing;* he may be seen to be continually at it, and yet be labouring in such a spirit as to render his service fruitless and unprofitable to himself and to his master.

Grudging Service. Many a man, to-day, is performing his daily round of tasks in a spirit of utter unwillingness, goaded solely to its execution by the insistent barb of sheer necessity. Here, for example, is an artizan—a carpenter, say, or a mason. He does his work well—there is no fault to be found with him on that score. But he does just as little as he can (and "get by with it") for

as much as he can get in the form of wages. His heart is never in his job; he never gives so much as a thought as to whether the man who is employing him profits by his labour, or loses on the deal. All he wants, and all he cares about, is this: sink or swim, he must have *his*. In a million instances, labour has proved itself to be as ruthless, and as heartless, as capital. In this regard, and outside the province of their rightful operation, both are tyrannical, and void and empty of any vestige of the spirit of rightful service.

Cringing Service. There is a type of a man and a type of servitude to whom, and to which no terms apply so fittingly as "toady" and "toadyism." About them hangs an obsequious atmosphere which stifles all independent motion, and earns the well-merited contempt of those compelled to witness the dubious spectacle of a time-server in action. This surviving remnant of a long since dead-and-gone feudalism, is quite as foreign to the spirit of service, as the spurious article presented by the disciple of the "so much, for so much."

Truculent Service. This brand of service is given its most reprehensible exemplification in the province of institutions and causes. We all know the man who, while professing adherence to a party, to an ideal, to a crusade, even, is forever playing the insurgent, and posing as a herald of revolt. His support is always a rather more than doubtful asset, and his party is pronouncedly the gainer, when the time comes for him to exchange his truculent support for an attitude of ruthless defection.

Willing Service. There is a type which, when contrasted with the types just considered, takes upon itself the character and effect of a bracing, tonic wind. No grudging spirit, here; no Uriah Heepian servility; no incessant probing of wounds done by hand of "the candid friend." Willingness makes of service a joy—a joy to the giver

and receiver alike. If one take a concordance and consult the Scriptural passages which record instances of the exercise of this quality, he will come upon some truly inspiring reading. The opening stave of the Song of Deborah (Judges 5: 2) gives thanks for the day "when the people *willingly* offered themselves." Among the mighty men of valour that Jehoshaphat gathered about him, we read of Amasiah, the son of Zichri, "who *willingly* offered himself to the Lord" (2 Chron. 17: 16). In the days of the restoration under Nehemiah, it is recorded that "the people blessed all the men, that *willingly* offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem" (Neh. 11: 2); during the rebuilding of the wall of the city under the same great leader, too, it is recorded, that "the people had a *mind* to work" (Neh. 4: 6). In all spheres of activity, in every branch of service, the willing volunteer is worth "a dozen pressed men." There is an inspiring snap, and verve, and finish to the work of the willing hand which is motived, impelled and guided, by the impulses of the willing heart.

Kindly Service. Here is a type standing in direct contradistinction to the disgruntled and truculent brand. The relations which it establishes and maintains between the served and the server, between master and servant, make contacts congenial, and productive of good fellowship and equity. When practised in the realm of morals and religion, it engenders and promotes generosity of spirit, and gives daily exemplification to homely, workaday virtues, without which even the most austerely spiritual are notably incomplete. Tennyson's word, that "kind hearts are more than coronets," stands like stone, in all life's manifold ramifications, and in none more manifestly than that of service rendered and duty done.

Loving Service. Not infrequently, stern moralists have declared, that of all types of service, this deserves the

least credit; that, quite often, when reason and even justice point to a certain course of action, love will demand another and manages to have her way. Service forthcoming only at love's behest, is something with which equity or will has little to do. If it so happen that these attributes coincide, so much the better; if not, they are brushed aside, and love proclaimed conqueror.

There is much that is true and beyond the bounds of reasonable dispute, in this contention. But the love which dictates such a course, is not the high-souled flame which forms the theme of Paul's immortal apostrophe. We have always thought the finest clause in that glorious thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, to be this: "Love . . . seeketh not her own." When a pure and lambent flame of *that* sort burns on the altars of the heart, the type of service to which it will give light and life, will have naught in it of self or self-gratification; nor will it follow blindly along roads which lead *away* from righteous living and high ideals. When love is pure and free of taint, it operates in a definitely different fashion from that charged against it by its critics, and inspires a type of service, than which there is none higher tendered by human hearts.

Extra Service. We come now to the pith of the parable. The moment a man places himself on the platform of purely mechanical service, that moment he collides sharply with the spirit of this parable which says to him, in effect: "If you put the matter on a purely business basis, on the ground of your prerogatives and merits, on the ground of your rights, I meet you on that ground, and challenge you to make good your claim. What right have you to aught of service, ye may render at this time?" This is, indeed, a master's answer to a servant, when that servant puts himself entirely in the menial's place. Over such a spirit, Christ asserts His

masterdom. He has no word of thanks for the grumbling slave, who grudges service at His table, after the day's ploughing. He asserts His rights as liege Lord.

Without reserve. But there is a higher plane, and the teaching of the parable leads us to occupy it. When a man accepts Christ's right over him with his whole heart, not as a sentence to servitude, but as his dearest privilege, counting it to be above all price to be owned by such a Master, he finds himself to be a possessor, as well as a possession. When a servant gives himself to Christ's service *without reserve,* the Master puts Himself at the disposal of the servant. "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's," can be transposed, for such an one, with even an added blessing—"And ye are Christ's; all things are yours."

No Christian can shut himself up to a limited routine of duty. So long as a man's work is merely carrying out another's orders, in a fashion which admits of no individual initiative or interpretation, it will tend to be little more than mechanical action. But the moment a man's work become the development of an idea, the expression of a definite and cherished purpose; the moment it enlist his will, his sympathy and his affection; above all, the moment it take on the character of a passion or an enthusiasm—that moment it overleaps the bounds of mere routine and mechanical effort, and becomes *service* whether to a cause, or a person or an ideal into which a man interjects *himself,* and pours his very soul. In its every phase and detail, this order requires to be followed and duplicated in Christian service. If it fail to be, the result is naught but misspent energy, and a harvest of nothing but leaves!

No overtime. As all of us are aware, in the field of manual labour, when the period agreed upon by master and servant as a working day is covered, continued

service demands and receives a special rate of wages. To this increased payment, the general term, "overtime" is applied. But, as between the Christian and his Master there is no overtime, no special rate of remuneration, no holidays. "There is no discharge in the war."

We may see this principle effective in any of the various phases, of what, for the lack of a better term, one may be permitted to describe as the "higher" forms of mundane activity. The lawyer does not count the hours which duty and the hope of achieving a legal triumph compel him to spend in studying his brief. He would make each day forty-eight hours in length, if he could. He has a cause to successfully prosecute or defend, and that is all he thinks about. The physician who would refuse to answer a sick-call at dead of night, or refuse to visit a patient after a certain hour, would soon find himself with abundant leisure during the rest of the day. Times and seasons must be disregarded—swallowed up—in the purpose of saving lives and relieving pain. An artist recks not of time when working at his canvas. On the contrary, he rebels when the curtains of night are drawn, and growls in disgust as his good north light fails.

The Christian is in similar case. It is his business, as it is his privilege, to be always at it, counting not the times and seasons, and knowing naught of lengths of days. It makes no exacting demands on a man's discernment to perceive the truth of this statement. Wherever he may be—east, west, north, south—whatever the hour—morning, noon or night—the work and business of a follower of Christ *is to be a Christian.* There are no "off" days or hours, no point at which the service ceases, except arranged for on special terms. He is bound (if he desire to keep his rating) to manifest such graces of character and worthy service as the situation

require; to do the one obviously Christian thing the circumstances demand; to preserve, through all the hours, of all his days, of all his years, loyalty to his Lord; to act, and serve, and labour, and do all, whether of word or deed, "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

"We Are Unprofitable Servants." The teaching advanced by our Lord at this point in the parable, is plain and evident to any earnest and impartial student. It overthrows, entirely, all idea of creature-merit. When we have done all that Christ commands, we have done no more than our duty; and even in what we do, there are countless imperfections. We cannot call God to reckoning, as if He were entered on the debit side of our ledger. To talk of any *claim* to God's favour in the light of this statement is absurd. God rewards by promise and by covenant and not by indebtedness to the product of His own creation and power. "You have not had your due," were the words addressed by a wife to her husband, a minister of the Gospel, and who had been deprived of some advantage she considered to have been his right—"You have not had your due." "May God be praised that I have *not*, my dear," he replied. "What think you, *is* my due, as an imperfect sinner before God?"

The Spirit of a True Servant of God. Notwithstanding a true Christian's sense of his own unworthiness, he may rest comforted, that no matter how limited his scope and imperfect his service, if he be but faithful he is approved of God. Honesty of intention, sincerity of motive, the diligence with which he addresses himself to his task, count for more with the Master, than the amount of work accomplished. It is quality and not quantity with Him, and His demand is not for a "profitable" but a faithful servant. "People talk of the sacrifice I have made, in spending so much of my time in

Africa," said David Livingstone. "It is emphatically *no* sacrifice. It is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering or danger, with a foregoing of some of the common amenities of life—all these things are as nothing when compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. I never *made* a sacrifice. It was made *for me,* by One who gave Himself for *us.*"

Questions. What is the cardinal teaching of the parable? What attitude of mind did it correct? What are the nature and claims of service? How does service differ in quality, character, and objective? What are the three types of questionable service dealt with in our study, and what the three calling for commendation? What is regarded as being the pith of the parable? How does this relate to the Christian man or woman of to-day? What is the true spirit of service such as should be shown by the servant of God? What is meant by the term "unprofitable servant"? Despite the justification of its use, how is the Christian comforted? What truly great and good man testified to this? What did he declare to be its reference to himself?

XIX

THE UNJUST JUDGE, THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luke 18: 1–14

GETTING THINGS BY PRAYER

The Subject of Prayer ought always to have an absorbing interest for Christian men and women, primarily, because it is the very life-breath of their profession as followers of the Master. It is with prayer that it begins; it is in prayer that it flourishes; if it perish, it is in prayer, or in the lack of it, rather, that it begins to decay. Whatever throws light on the subject, practice and objective of prayer, therefore, makes for the health of our souls.

The objectives of the two parables coupled in this study, are clearly stated in the Scripture that records them. The first, Jesus spake "to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint"; the second "He spake unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." The first teaches the value of importunity in prayer; the second, the spirit which should pervade our praying. The first encourages us to pray and faint not; the second reminds us of how, and in what manner, we ought to pray. Both should be often pondered by every true and earnest Christian.

The Unjust Judge. This parable, and that of "The Friend at Midnight," recorded in Luke 11: 5–13, illustrate the same idea, namely, that importunity prevails, without regard to the specific character of the person on whom it is practised. But the parable immediately under review,

has a special reference to which the other is not made to apply. The injunction of Jesus "that men ought always to pray," and the story which follows, are closely related to the doctrine of the Second Advent, with which the preceding chapter of Luke's Gospel concludes. It is "prayer without fainting" during the long, weary interval between Christ's first coming and the second, which Jesus urges His followers to keep up. In that interval, we ourselves are standing, and the temptation to faint in prayer for the second coming of the Son of man is a very real one. Wrong appears to be so firmly entrenched; true wisdom and justice and righteousness appear to be making such poor headway; wickedness appears to renew itself in so many new and heinous forms, that even the most vigilant are tempted to become weary, and to cease hoping and praying definitely, for the new and better reign.

The Importance of Perseverance. Our Lord conveys this lesson by telling the story of a friendless widow, who obtained justice from a wicked magistrate, by dint of sheer importunity. Our Lord Himself supplies the application: "Hear what the unjust judge saith. Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?"

It is far more easy to begin a habit of prayer than it is to keep it up. Let this thought be deeply graven on our hearts. There are a number of things—fear, necessity, the prickings of conscience, bereavement, emotion, misfortune—may lead a man to begin to pray, after a fashion. But to go on praying—*to keep it up*—requires faith. Especially when an answer, which was expected to be granted speedily is long delayed, are we apt to grow weary and to lend an ear to the temptation of the Evil One, that the entire process is nothing more than an essay in futility. Then comes the time when the parable before us ought to be carefully recalled. It is our bounden duty

to remember, in such an hour, that Jesus expressly declared that "men ought always to pray and not to faint."

There is none of us immune from the assaults of restiveness, sometimes of impatience, even, in the hour of affliction or necessity. At such a time—it is useless to deny it—we are prone to feel that God sometimes turns a deaf ear to the prayers of His people. We expected a speedier deliverance; we had thought we possessed a claim to be heard and delivered, the moment our voices were heard on high. Left for any length of time in a crisis of trial, or in the furnace of affliction, or to the will of our enemies, and we are tempted to think hard things of God, as though He took part with the oppressors, or, at any rate, was contented to endure them, while the crying of His afflicted people was as nothing in His ears. We are ready to exclaim—we *do* exclaim—with the storm-tossed disciples: "Carest thou not that we perish?" It is this very temptation, to which those who strive to be faithful, in hours such as these, that the teaching of this parable is intended to meet.

The secret inclination to hurry our praying, to shorten our petitions, to abandon our supplications altogether—these things are a direct temptation of the Evil One. They are of that category of besetments which require to be dealt with promptly, decisively, lest disaster follow. They are to be cast behind our backs. It is ours to resolve to pray on—steadily, patiently, perseveringly,—never doubting, convinced that not only are we benefited and made strong thereby, but that God hears and will answer, in His own good time. Whatever of sacrifice and self-denial it may involve, we must pray on, pray always, without ceasing, without fainting, "continuing in prayer."

Reasonable praying. Not all the prayers we raise to God, are going to be answered now, or in the near future, or at "the long last." Level-headed, consistent and emi-

nently sensible in most other relationships, some of us are apt to become highly unreasonable when engaged in the holy exercise of prayer. We should profit by bearing in mind that many of the gifts we seek at the hands of God, are qualities of heart and soul which can be produced only by long and even painful processes. "Give us a heart like Thine," we pray, and we know not what we ask. We pray for humility, but reck not that in doing so, we are asking to be vouchsafed a state of mind in which humility becomes humiliation. We ask for an heavenly mind. But we consider not, that in so doing, we are asking to be led forward into the experience of One who had not where to lay His head—to feel that we have no permanent earthly home. We ask to be near Christ and to be like Him. Can we be baptized with His baptism? Can we drink of His cup? In many instances the answer *must be*—"We cannot," and God never answers unreasonable prayers.

Nevertheless we fall back on our Lord's command in this passage, that we should continue praying. If there was one thing more than another that Jesus taught about His Father, it is that God hears and answers prayer. Jesus *knew* God; having been in the heaven of His presence, the Master understood how heavenly things are managed and He declared, without the semblance of a doubt, that if we go on asking we shall receive; that if we go on knocking at a door that now is shut, we shall one day find it opening to us, giving us liberty to pass through all that bars our progress into a place of large fulfillment, where prayers are answered and souls blessed.

The Pharisee and the Publican. About this parable certain misconceptions have grown up, which appear to hide the real point of its teaching. One of these has to do with the respective position of the two men, with

regard to character. There ought to be no mistake about the fact of the Pharisee being the better man of the two, in any practical or everyday sense of the term. Of course, it were possible for the Pharisee to have been a hypocrite, and for his account of himself to have been false. But nowhere in the story is there the barest suggestion or hint of such a thing; to make it, therefore, would be to offer an entirely unwarranted supposition. Taking his own account of himself as being substantially true, it cannot be denied that he had much cause to give thanks to God for what he was; and had he done it with humility, and have remembered that his being unlike other men, was due solely to God's grace, and to the advantage he had enjoyed, he would have done well.

But he gave thanks, also, that he was not "even as this publican." This, of course, goes against him, because we know that the publican was nearer heaven than he was. This fact notwithstanding, it is not difficult to perceive that had he but thanked God, from the heart, for having been saved from the bad traditions of the publican's calling, and the evil surroundings and manifold temptations of a publican's life, no fault could have been found with him, on any reasonable or tenable grounds.

Another misconception requiring correction is the mistaken notion that the publican was entirely justified and wholly forgiven, by his lowly demeanour and self-condemning words. Our Lord does not so declare. His words are: "I tell you this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other." One imagines that neither was truly justified, but, of the two, the publican was nearer being justified than the Pharisee. As yet, the former was far from the kingdom of heaven, but he was not nearly so far as the Pharisee, for, at least, he was on the right way, having entered at the gate of humility, and there was nothing, save himself, to hinder his going

forward. But the Pharisee had missed the entrance altogether.

It should never be thought, however, that Jesus meant the publican's humility to stand as an example of sufficient repentance. If, when he "went down to his house," the tax-gatherer resumed his exactions and extortions; his tricks of trade, and petty deceits; if he went from the Temple to begin again his falsifying of accounts with the government, or the seizure of goods belonging to unfortunate citizens unable to meet his demands—if he did all this, his beating upon his breast would prove to be nothing but a futile gesture, and his apparently humble petition no more than his own personal acknowledgment of a fact already quite well known both to God and his fellowmen. No: something more, something that *reached forward*, was needed, for entire justification. "A broken and a contrite heart" is sure of an audience with God—this, He will not despise. But it is to the heart resolved upon drastic amendment and the production of fruit worthy of repentance, that He grants the tokens of His favour, and the benisons of His love.

What Jesus Seeks to Stress in this story, is the fatal danger of spiritual pride. This was the factor which made the Pharisee, with all his real cause for thanksgiving to be further from the kingdom and righteousness of God, than the publican whom he despised. What should have been a prayer of thankfulness in the mouth of this man, was turned into a glorification of himself. He told God how good he was, what time he should have been asking God to make him better.

We are all, naturally, self-righteous. It is a sort of family complaint, common to all the children of Adam. From the highest to the lowest, we are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. We secretly flatter ourselves that we are not so bad as some,

that we have some quality or another which specially commends us to the favour of God. "Most men will proclaim every man his own goodness" (Prov. 20: 6). A disposition to regard others as being misguided, misinformed folk spiritually inferior to ourselves, abounds freely among us, and against its presence and prevalence in our midst, the Master directs the lesson of this parable.

The true cure for self-righteousness is self-knowledge. Once let the eyes of our spiritual understanding be opened, and we shall talk no more of our goodness, nor enter God's presence with any word of it upon our lip, or in our heart. Once let us glimpse what is in our hearts—in the chamber of our imagery—and what the holy law of God requires, and self-conceit will be smitten dead within us. "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are"—will *that* be our prayer? No, no! With our hands upon our mouths we shall cry with the leper, "Unclean, unclean!"

The Great Defect of the Pharisee's Prayer. It is so glaring that a mere child might mark it: the absence of all sense of sin and need. It contains no confession, no petition, no acknowledgment of emptiness, no supplication for mercy and grace. It is a mere recital of fancied merits, to which is added an uncharitable reflection on a fellow-sinner. It is so devoid of penitence, humility and charity as to be hardly deserving of the name of prayer at all. We have need to guard against the state of mind capable of finding expression in such lamentable form. What does it signify that we are more moral than "other men"? We are all imperfect in the sight of God. Let us remember this: In all our self-examination, let us avoid comparing ourselves with the standards of men. Let us look at nothing but the requirements of God. He that acts on this principle will never pray the prayer of the Pharisee.

The Prayer of the Publican, Which Our Lord Commends. By the simple recognition of things *as they really were,* this petition at a bound, shoots far ahead of that of the Pharisee. It is a real petition—the utterance of a man so thoroughly alive to the nature of his shortcomings and the character of his sin, that he cannot even address God directly, but simply ejaculates, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It is the prayer of a true penitent, who has no vestige of right to speak contemptuously of his neighbours, *and knows it;* who is left with no alternative but to offer a directly personal prayer. Vagueness and generality are among the great defects of our praying. To get away from "we" and "our" and "us," to "I," and "my," and "me," is to make a great step forward, in the art and exercise of true praying, and to draw consciously nearer to God and the kingdom of His grace. Finally, it was a humble prayer, and one which came from the heart of the man who offered it. He was deeply moved when uttering it, and smote upon his breast as though he felt far more than he could verbally express. And concerning him, the Master says: "I tell you this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other." Hopeful, indeed, is the condition of a man willing to take his place by the side of the publican. When our spiritual experience coincides with his, we may feel that we have found a seat in the school of prayer, and a right of access to the feet of God.

The Final Word of Jesus is in Praise of Humility: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." That the Master set great store by this virtue, and deemed it to be of great importance in the equipment of His followers, is instanced by the fact that we find Him using the words, cited above, three times in the Gospels, and on three separate and distinct occasions. He placed it

among the first and foremost of the Christian graces, and during the years He walked the earth, He exemplified it unceasingly in His own Person. It found expression, too, in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Job, Isaiah and Daniel. It ought to be a leading grace in all who profess to serve Christ. Many of God's people are without wealth or positions of large influence; they are not endowed with gifts calculated to bring them preaching, or teaching, or literary renown; they are not qualified to assume prominent places in church life. On the other hand, there are those of the household of faith who have wealth and influence, and gifts and notable qualities. Yet one and all are called upon to have and to exercise the grace of humility. *It is the absolute hall-mark of the sterling Christian mintage.* Without it, the professed Christian is either altogether counterfeit or below the standard of assay; and the impeccable truth of the Master's word concerning it, still stands: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Questions. What are the chief objectives of the parables here coupled? What other parable emphasizes the principle stressed in the first of these? To what great event in the Christian dispensation does the story of the Unjust Judge have reference? To what virtue does Jesus here attach large importance? To what signal temptation are beginners in the school of prayer subject? What other pitfalls beset his feet? Why are some prayers left unanswered? What is the injunction of Jesus in this regard? What are some common misconceptions concerning the parable of the Pharisee and the publican? What is the humility of the latter *not* intended to teach? What was the outstanding defect of the Pharisee's prayer? What does Jesus specifically warn us against, in this relation? What are the outstanding characteristics of the prayer of the publican which render it acceptable? What is the final word of the Master concerning humility and self-exaltation?

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